

EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF GENOCIDE SURVIVORS  
IN LANDSCAPES OF VIOLENCE IN CAMBODIA

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by

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## Chapter One: Introduction

I grew up listening to family stories shared by my mother, in which she described her childhood life, family history, and life during and after the Khmer Rouge regime. It was often on special occasions such as a relative's wedding, Khmer New Year, *Pchum Ben* (festival to honor deceased ancestors), or the Water Festival that my mother was moved to recount her experiences. Her stories were filled with contrasting emotions: joy, sadness, and pain. She described the joy of living in the brief, yet prosperous years of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum period (1955-1970), during which our family led relatively peaceful lives, with my father serving the government as a drama teacher. She emphasized the anxiety of daily life amid the civil war (1970 to 1975), when the family struggled to survive the internal armed conflicts that tore the country apart.

Among all the stories that she related, those about the Khmer Rouge regime stood out as the most tragic and significant in her life. She recounted the experiences of her family as the country fell into the hands of the Khmer Rouge in April 1975. In detail, she described the evacuation of Phnom Penh and the dire living conditions imposed by the Khmer Rouge, which included starvation, hard labor and lack of medical care. She often recounted how my father was forced to labor in the fields and how my two brothers were sent far from home to tend cattle and collect cow dung. She also related how my father, a thoroughly urban resident working among other men and women his age, survived the regime and how his experiences shaped the way in which our family lived in the post-Khmer Rouge era. These thoughts were etched in her memory, and they influenced the way we lived in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge, when the majority of Cambodians struggled to reconstruct their families and rebuild society-at-large. In addition, for many years some parts of

Cambodia continued to experience armed conflict between Khmer Rouge loyalists who had fled to the border to form their own movement and the newly-established Vietnamese-backed government known as the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK).

Officially, the Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia for three years, eight months, and twenty days.<sup>1</sup> Between April 1975 and January 1979, Democratic Kampuchea (DK)—as Cambodia had been renamed during this period—was led by the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK, better known as the Khmer Rouge). In less than four years, nearly two million people died as a result of execution, starvation, disease, and overwork. Many millions more were subjected to indiscriminate arrest, detainment, and torture.

My mother's narrative is not uncommon, but rather shared by all men, women, and children who survived the Khmer Rouge regime. It represents the struggles of Cambodian families in their efforts to overcome the tragedies of the past. All of these narratives personify the memories that are held deep in the psyches of individual survivors. Notably, though, these past memories exist not only in the minds of survivors, but are also socially constructed and spatially ingrained in the surrounding landscapes. More importantly, the memories are shaped and shared through materialized and non-materialized landscapes. Specific memories of the Khmer Rouge period are attached to physical concrete sites such as prisons, mass graves, dams, canals, and labor camps. They are also implicitly represented in non-material forms, including commemorations, art performances, religious rituals, and other spectacles that embody events associated with this tragic period. For survivors, these landscapes symbolize both the past violence and the memory of that violence. Living among the landscapes of past violence during the post-genocide period has caused survivors to relive the violent experiences that they endured in that space.

Dealing with the aftermath of mass violence thus means confronting the daily challenges of living among the landscapes of past violence and struggling to cope with the traumatic past.

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<sup>1</sup> Cambodian people refer to three years, eight months, and twenty days as a euphemism for the Khmer Rouge regime, which was officially known as Democratic Kampuchea.

Individual survivors are forced to relive their past experiences as they continue to plant and harvest the rice fields, gaze upon dams and canals which were constructed with forced labor, and encounter mass graves (marked or unmarked) in their personal landscape. These memories have been a constant presence in the daily life of survivors as they struggled to rebuild their lives following the genocide years. I now perceive the story of my family as a model for many other stories of Khmer Rouge survivors. Each story is a case study of a survivor's everyday life during and after the genocide period and can be instructive in teaching the significance of personal narration as opposed to the national narratives that have dominated the history and geography of Cambodia. It provides us with an insight into the past through the lens of personal history. Consequently, personal narratives contribute much to the constellation of genocide memory, everyday experiences, and associated geographical and temporal settings.

My desire to understand survivors' past experiences and the influence of those experiences on their present life within the landscapes of past violence echoes in the central questions that support this thesis. Firstly, I would like to explore survivors' experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime and the legacy of the genocide on their present everyday life. I would also like to understand how their contemporary life among sites of violence is informed by their memory of the genocide, how they go about their everyday life working and living amid the landscapes of violence. Lastly, I wonder how they relate their personal experiences to the national memorialization of the violence that took place in Cambodia.

This thesis seeks to examine unmarked or unremarkable sites of violence and landscapes in which stories remain untold or unknown to outsiders. Physical buildings and landmarks remain within communities as evidence of past violence or atrocities. As James Loewen (1999) remarks in his book *Lies across America*, representation of the past in the form of monuments and markers remains as an important part of the legacy of landscapes. However, he also recognizes that the historical past has often been misrepresented or inaccurately told in the landscape through the

selection of sites, historical monuments, or markers. Some stories are omitted from the public discourse, while others are portrayed inaccurately. Therefore the purpose of this thesis is three-fold. Firstly, it seeks to reconstruct the production of violent landscapes. This will be accomplished through an analysis of the Khmer Rouge policies and practices which led to the executions and willful neglect of almost two million people and resulted in the violent landscapes of the present day. Secondly, I will document the experiences of survivors who currently live within these violent landscapes. Through interviews with Khmer Rouge survivors, I will discuss how men and women lived through the genocide years and how they conduct their day-to-day activities in the present amid sites of past mass violence. Lastly, I will consider how living and working on a daily basis among sites of violence impacts how they remember the violence. This has significant implications for understanding how future attempts to promote healing and reconciliation through the memorialization of genocide are developed. By exploring the experiences of survivors who lived through and among the sites of mass violence during and after the Khmer Rouge regime, this thesis makes two major claims: 1) although there is a variation in individual experience, the ways in which survivors narrate their experiences appear to relate to standard or collective narratives widely revealed at the national level; and 2) while many Cambodians expressed concern about younger generations not being aware of the Democratic Kampuchea regime due to a lack of recognition of the unmarked or unremarked sites of violence that left minimal physical evidence of the violence that was perpetrated, many survivors have advocated alternative means of education in this regard, including textbooks and formal education within schools to instruct students about what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime.

In this introductory chapter, I outline the historical background of the Khmer Rouge state of Democratic Kampuchea and the country's transition from the regime to the post-genocide era. This background is followed by a brief discussion of the memorialization of violence in the landscape of

the post-genocide period. In the last section of this chapter, I describe the organization of the thesis and briefly introduce the subjects, structure and arguments of the subsequent chapters.

### **Historical Background of the Democratic Kampuchea Regime (1975-1979)**

The landscape of Cambodia reflects its recent past history—a history marked by mass violence. Cambodia endured five years of civil armed conflict from 1970 to 1975. The country then fell into the hands of the Khmer Rouge armed forces, which formally renamed the country Democratic Kampuchea and ruled the country for nearly four years, from April 17, 1975 to January 7, 1979.

Instead of ending the bloody civil war, which had gripped the country for five years, the Khmer Rouge initiated a series of policies and practices that resulted in widespread violence. Cities and towns were evacuated and inhabitants were forced into the countryside to labor on mass agricultural initiatives. It has been established that the Khmer Rouge targeted particular groups of people, among them Buddhist monks, ethnic minorities, and urban “intelligentsia”—educated elites and city workers who were categorized as ‘new people.’ Unlike the ‘base people,’ who had joined the revolution prior to 1975, ‘new people’ or ‘April 17 people’ had not taken part in the struggle to defeat the U.S.-backed Lon Nol government. As such, their commitment to the new government was considered suspect. Collective cooperatives, labor camps and massive agricultural and irrigation projects were initiated throughout the country and administered through a complex governmental structure. Treatment of the population under Khmer Rouge rule was somewhat arbitrary. New people generally received harsher treatment than base people. Minor actions such as breaking an agricultural tool or expressing an unfavorable opinion about the Khmer Rouge organization were considered crimes and could lead to arrest or execution. Consequently, labor camps and prisons were established throughout the country to facilitate these punitive practices.

The living and working conditions of the population varied depending upon location and social class. Michael Vickery (1984: 139) made a notable observation of geographical and temporal differences in the Khmer Rouge treatment of the population: "In some areas urban evacuees suffered immediately from the brutality of local cadres, and life improved marginally after the purge and reorganization by the Southwest in 1977." It is well-documented by researchers of the Cambodian genocide that zonal administration was not uniform, but rather dependent on the experiences of revolutionary organizations and administrative leaders of the zone (Chandler, Kienan and Boua 1988; Vickery 1984; Kienan 2002). The less intense form of leadership resulted in a more moderate treatment of the local population. This distinction has been evidenced through a number of testimonies from refugees who escaped from Cambodia and made it to the refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian borders (Vickery 1984).

In many instances, populations were divided into different labor forces based on age, gender, and marital status. Unmarried persons were assigned to mobile units and forced to perform hard labor such as building dams and digging canals, while elders who were in their 70s or 80s were placed in a 'grandparent' unit to perform light tasks such as babysitting children whose parents were working. Consequently, family members were separated. New people were usually treated with suspicion and were thus targeted for hard labor. In an effort to control the population, individuals were required to identify their backgrounds, which in many cases revealed their true and anti-revolutionary nature. In such situations, individuals were targeted, either overtly or covertly, for particular collections, movements, or executions. Actions such as disobedience, or breaking an agricultural tool could also result in punishment and possibly execution.

Standard narratives have described the closings of hospitals, schools, and temples; banning of religious practices and money; and disallowance of all forms of arts and performance identified with the previous regime and family life (Kiernan 1996; Chandler 1991). What we have observed beyond these narratives is that some of these physical structures were converted and reused to



serve other purposes such as factories, hospitals, or warehouses (See Tyner *et al.*, 2014). While these actions have primarily been described as the destruction of the old regime, scholars have explained the state of the Khmer Rouge as a state of reconstruction (see Tyner 2011, 2012). Major agricultural projects based upon the construction of irrigation systems were commenced throughout the country. The emphasis on agricultural intensification, however, did not guarantee success in food production nor did it provide the population with sufficient food rations. In some areas, the rice production was so low that people starved, while in others rice was unequally distributed, causing malnutrition and disease.

### **Zone and Regional Variations**

Establishment of an administrative and governance structure was critical for the military-style leadership of the Khmer Rouge. Following their wartime organization, the DK governed the country through a complex geographic administration. DK divided the geographic administration of the country into a hierarchy of zones, regions, districts, cooperatives, and villages. Each zone incorporated two or more provinces or parts of former provinces (Dy 2007: 23), with the zone denoting the highest level of political organization followed by its subordinate levels. DK zones were divided into 32 regions and all the zones and regions were designated by a number. By 1976, according to DK's political geography map, the country was divided into six geographical zones: the Northeast, North, Northwest, West, Southwest, and East. Over time, the boundaries of these zones were altered, as some zones were combined or divided to form new zonal divisions. This political geographic organization was critical to DK's administration of the country.

Despite generalized descriptions of living conditions during DK, disparities among various zones have been noted. Living conditions varied from zone to zone, as well as from district to district and village to village inside the zones (Chandler 1991: 269). In the Northwest and the North, where a high number of evacuees from Phnom Penh were relocated, living conditions were

harsher than in the rest of the country; consequently, many people died from starvation, disease, and overwork. New people were forced to work in jungle areas where they were highly exposed to malaria and other diseases. David Chandler, however, cautions us that differentiations within zones also existed; for example, Region 3 in Battambang Province (Northwest Zone) earned an exceptional reputation for its high rice yields and relatively responsive cadres (1991: 269). The Southwest Zone, in particular, demonstrated enthusiasm for the Zone leader, Ta Mok, throughout the collectivization process and the purge of class enemies. The severity of forced labor and of food shortages were unevenly distributed based on the geography (Vickery 1984), with the Eastern Zone, for example, enjoying relatively less harsh conditions than other zones. In the Eastern Zone, before the administration was dismantled, living conditions were relatively better for both base people and new people and the cadres had more experience than those in other zones. Michael Vickery also suggests that the differences among living conditions may have resulted not only from variations in agricultural productions, but also from differences in administration of policies (1984: 128). Although this was the case in the early period of DK rule, cadres from the Eastern Zone came under increasing suspicion by the central leadership after 1976, the result of which was a violent and widespread purge of the high officials and their fellow cadres throughout the Zone. Although variations in administration have been identified and have become the subject of ongoing debates, some general consistencies in the practices of DK can be found in the accounts of Khmer Rouge survivors. Collectivization, and the prohibition of private property and religious practices, for example, all occurred during the period.

By late 1978, conditions throughout DK had deteriorated. The state was weakened by its continued inability to maintain an adequate food ration among the population, secret executions, and violent and widespread purges among the party members. On December 20, 1978, the Vietnamese, along with the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS or the Front) swiftly invaded the DK state with a force of 150,000 armed troops, capturing a significant amount of

territory. By January 4, 1979, the heavily-armed troops were in control of seven provinces of Cambodia east of the Mekong River (Gottesman 2003: 10). On January 7, 1979, the troops captured the capital city of Phnom Penh, which marked the official end of the DK regime.

The DK state had established policies and practices in an effort to rebuild the country through intense agricultural and irrigation projects—practices which ultimately led to the deaths of approximately two million people. Some people were executed by Khmer Rouge authorities; many others perished from starvation, disease, or overwork. The physical manifestation of the violence, represented by the security centers, labor camps, mass graves, and burial sites, remains widespread in the landscapes of Cambodia. Attempts to mark and memorialize these sites were immediately initiated by the new government beginning in 1979. Among all such sites, only eighty-eight have been memorialized, in most cases through the construction of stupas. Some of these memorials have endured to the present; others have been neglected. However, other sites with potential for memorialization remain unmarked, with the remembrance and commemoration of genocide remaining unrecognized in favor of the dominant political narrative.

### **Memorializing Landscapes of Violence during the PRK Period**

Immediately after the fall of the DK regime, the leaders of the Front announced the establishment of a new state, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) (Gottesman 2005: 11). This new government faced significant challenges in the reconstruction of the country, as there was barely an adequate infrastructure remaining. Despite these challenges, the most important task for PRK leaders was to initiate a political agenda to justify its invasion of the DK regime and thus legitimize its right to exist. The PRK realized political opportunity through recognition of the landscapes of violence left behind by the DK regime. These landscapes of violence provided evidence of the crimes committed against Cambodians by the Khmer Rouge government. Thus, in

the early period of their occupation, the PRK began memorializing the past violence through several initiatives.

The first and major memorial initiative was the transformation of two significant sites of the violence perpetrated by the DK state: the S-21 Khmer Rouge prison and the killing fields and mass graves at Choeung Ek. The change in regimes contributed to the establishment of official narratives to serve the political objectives of the new regime. As David Chandler argues, memories of the DK period and what was written about it were channeled by the new regime to suit the 'demonizing' policies favored by the regime (2008: 358). Among the sites of violence left behind by the Khmer Rouge, the PRK quickly memorialized the two prominent sites mentioned above. The S-21 Prison was transformed into the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum; the killing fields and mass graves at Choeung Ek became a memorial site. Ultimately, the PRK used these two places as major landmarks to convey the national narrative for remembrance and memorialization of "genocide."

Before the genocidal Khmer Rouge period, Tuol Sleng had been a high school in the inner city of Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge converted it into a security center designated as 'S-21'—a facility utilized by Khmer Rouge security forces for imprisonment, torture and interrogation. David Chandler (1999: 15) has extensively examined the roles and functions of S-21 and notes that the facility functioned as a place of incarceration, investigation, punishment and counterespionage. During its existence from 1976 to 1979, Chandler (1999: 36) estimates that the prison processed approximately 14,000 prisoners. Once arrested and detained, the prisoners were subjected to extremely brutal treatment, including interrogation, torture, and ultimately execution. Approximately 300 people are known to have survived the prison (Keo & Yin, 2011). Soon after Phnom Penh was captured by the invading Vietnamese and the Front, S-21 was discovered by two Vietnamese journalists who had been accompanying the troops and were drawn to the site by the smell of decomposing bodies (Chandler 1999: 2). The journalists took photographs of the bodies remaining in all of the interrogation rooms; some of those photos are now exhibited throughout the

Tuol Sleng Museum. A few days after the initial discovery of the prison, vast stacks of documents—including thousands of pages of documented confessions, mug-shot photographs, and notebooks of cadres—were found in the S-21 compound (Chandler 1999: 3)

Realizing the importance and potential propaganda value of these discoveries, the PRK officials proceeded to have the documents organized and archived and to convert the site into a museum. Mai Lam, who had extensive experience in legal studies and museology, arrived in Phnom Penh in March 1979 to lead the transformation of the site into an internationally-recognized museum of genocide (Chandler 1999:4). A couple of weeks after the renovation of the site, the museum hosted its first group of foreign visitors. Indeed, as asserted in PRK documentation, “the site was intended primarily to show... international guests the cruel torture committed by the traitors against the Khmer people.” (Chandler 1999: 8). The museum was officially opened to the public in July 1980.

The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is linked to another site of violence—the killing fields of Choeung Ek, located approximately 15 kilometers southwest of Phnom Penh. The mass graves at Choeung Ek were selected for excavation, also under Mai Lam’s supervision. A total of about 9,000 bodies were exhumed from the graves and initially placed in a wooden structure, which was later replaced with a monumental memorial stupa made from concrete and glass, built in the style of a Khmer Buddhist stupa. As suggested by Hughes (2008), however, the memorial was geared toward international visitors and violated Khmer religious practices, which required the cremation of dead bodies. The memorial was inaugurated and opened to visitors in 1988. The excavated pits were left exposed, forming open-air exhibitions with signs attesting to the horrific activities that took place on that landscape. Along with the Tuol Sleng Museum, the Choeung Ek Memorial reinforced the political message of the PRK in condemning the genocidal crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge. Neither the Choeung Ek Memorial nor the Tuol Sleng Museum provides a proper historical context

to the Khmer Rouge regime. However, both became significant political narratives to justify the existence of the new political regime of the PRK.

Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek have been selectively memorialized and thus represent the major, official narrative of the genocide which occurred during the DK regime and which pervades the studies of genocide memory. The significant message that Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek sent to the local population in the early period of the PRK regime, and which is still apparent today, was that the population needed to support the PRK government in order to prevent the Khmer Rouge from returning to power (Ledgerwood 1997: 91). The museum was opened primarily to welcome international visitors with the intent that they would return to their countries with the belief that the crimes committed by the DK regime ‘really’ happened in Cambodia (Ledgerwood 1997). Later, local Cambodians were transported from various places throughout the country to visit the museum and learn about the crimes against humanity and other crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge. Cambodians were indoctrinated by the PRK government with such political messages to justify the government’s legitimacy to rule and to promote reliance on the PRK, thus preventing the return to power of the Khmer Rouge. Such messages were featured prominently throughout the curation of S-21 and the exposed display of skulls and bones at the Choeung Ek mass graves site. Displays in the museum feature mug shots of victims and Khmer Rouge cadres, graphic images of torture and the corpses of prisoners, and a map of Cambodia depicted in skulls and bones. Through these images, the curator intended to establish a connection between the DK regime and the atrocious crimes that took place at S-21 and Choeung Ek.

While sites such as Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek provide visible evidence of memorialization, many other sites of violence have never been memorialized (Tyner *et al.*, 2014). Only a small portion of the innumerable documented sites of mass violence that are widespread throughout the country, including 196 security prison sites, 300 burial sites, and 200,000 mass graves,<sup>2</sup> have been

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<sup>2</sup> DC-Cam (2008) *Mapping Report*, unpublished report.

marked. Hundreds of other burial sites and labor camps stand as silent testimony to the pervasive violence which took place in Cambodia. These sites constitute unmarked, violent landscapes, identifiable only by local residents, and remain invisible to visitors who merely pass by the area. This is especially true for members of the younger generation who were born after the atrocities. The potential for these sites to become memorialized or represent the past violence have largely been associated with politics—the politics of memory which have been employed as a tool to justify the existing political regime. For those unmarked sites, the narratives of the past and survivors' experiences in the present have yet to be closely examined or documented.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

Continuing the brief discussion presented in the introduction, Chapter Two reviews some of the literature that examines the intersections of place, memory, memorialization, and everyday life. Specifically, the chapter discusses the production of violent landscapes, landscapes of memory and memorialization, and space of everyday life and trauma.

While the stories related here are based on personal narratives, I outline some of the methods I used in collecting and analyzing data in Chapter Three. I identify in-depth interviews in the form of oral histories and field observations as my approaches to data collection, while I employ a narrative approach to analyze the interviews for this thesis. I also provide a brief overview of the study area in which I conducted the interviews. I discuss in detail the geographic and political history of the study site, including the description of some specific locations.

In Chapters Four and Five, I use the framework of memorialization in landscape, memory and place to discuss survivors' narratives. I identify themes which emerged from the interviews, primarily topics of memorialization of violence, memories of base and new people, individual and national memories, and the intersection of traumatic experiences and space of everyday life. I pay particular attention to the interviewees' experiences in association with their living space. Finally,

Chapter Six concludes the thesis with a summary of my findings and a discussion of further research. It also summarizes the limitations of the thesis in relation to data and time.

Research findings presented in the thesis conclusion are twofold. Firstly, I argue that the memory of genocide and mass violence in the recent history of Cambodia remains invisible in the physical landscape of memory and memorialization in Cambodia. The local memorial, which was constructed primarily to serve political aspects of genocide memory during the PRK regime, has not been maintained properly, resulting in the complete removal of the physical structure from the landscape. Although victim remains were transferred to an old Buddhist stupa, the collective commemorative practices of the local people have gradually become invisible. The former practices have been replaced with individual and family religious funeral rituals for victims of the Khmer Rouge regime. This fact, coupled with changes in the economic and political structure of the country, has led to the memorialization of genocide victims through celebration of the Buddhist *Pchum Ben* festival. The traditional rituals associated with this celebration have helped the local population restore social and cosmic order. In the context of current commemorative landscapes, I also found that the personal narratives generated from survivors' memories have provided a level of understanding of local history and life under the DK regime. Without those narratives, the history of this period would be buried within the sites of violence that are left unremarkable. Only the survivors who lived and worked among the sites can share the stories that occurred in that space. However, this does not provide sufficient means for passing on the narratives and knowledge of DK to members of younger generations. The villagers of Prek Ta Meak have serious concerns about whether young people will learn sufficient details about life experiences under the DK regime through their personal narratives alone. Other forms of public education, including history textbooks, exhibitions, and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, are important in educating the young population about the DK regime.



In addition, although the individual experiences of survivors vary depending on location and time, the experiences narrated by survivors appear to conform to standard or collective narratives widely espoused at the national level. This research suggests that Cambodian survivors position their experiences in the context of the larger narratives in order to provide connection and comparison to the broader experience. Survivors generally accept that the dominant narratives constructed by the state are compatible with their own narratives, in particular their personal narratives about the widespread executions, deprived living and working conditions, and biases in treatment of base and new people. Survivors also provide comparison and contrast to the national narratives when sharing their own personal story so that the audience may better relate.

## **Chapter Two: Production of Violent Landscapes, Landscapes of Memory and Everyday Life**

In this chapter I review existing studies within the field of geography and related disciplines that examine the intersection of place, violence, memory, memorialization, and everyday life. In doing so, I establish the conceptualized context for my case study of the former Khmer Rouge prison known as Chamkar Siv, located in Prek Ta Meak Commune, Ksach Kandal District, and the experiences of survivors who live in the surrounding area. Much of this literature focuses on the ways in which discourses of violence and memory are produced, in particular places and at particular times, contested and materialized. The transition from spaces of violence to spaces of memory and everyday life provide the groundwork for the literature discussion. The review in this chapter is divided into three sections: (1) a discussion of the production of landscapes of violence; (2) space and memory; and (3) the landscapes of everyday life. While these discussions are central to our understanding of the contextual framework for place, violence, memory, and everyday life, the literature of these topics has its own geographic component. The discussion below will investigate the nature of the memory and construct a narrative of “where” and “whose” memory is being studied.

### **Production of Violent Landscapes**

In order to understand the mass atrocities that took place in the landscapes of Cambodia, it is necessary to consider the process by which these landscapes have been produced. During the DK regime, the landscapes of violence became evident through the material distribution of mass graves, prison sites, and labor camps. Mass death resulting from Khmer Rouge policies informed and is informed by how violence was materially carried out in the landscape. To that end, any

analysis of landscapes of memorialization and everyday life are predicated upon the discussion of the production of violence.

The geographic study of violence and death and their distributions across landscapes is a relatively small but flourishing sub-field. A body of existing literature broadly addresses distributions of violence and death across landscapes (Francaviglia 1971; Yeoh 1991; Zelinsky 1994; Yeoh & Hui 1995; Kong 1999; Teather 2001; Maddrell and Sidaway 2010; Romanillos 2011). This research has partly addressed the significance of the deaths for the living and examined the questions of cultural practices of cemeteries, the contest between sacred and secular in the deathscapes, and the politics of mourning. While these studies provide insights into the cultural aspects associated with death and life, the landscapes of violence and death resulting from the DK regime are not only manifested through direct violence, but also through indirect or structural violence.

According to Galtung's definition of violence (Galtung and Fischer 2013), direct violence identifies a subject as the actor of violence. In his definition of structural violence, however, the actor of violence no longer needs to be identified. In this case, violence is "a structure at work, churning out harm, causing basic human needs deficits" (Galtung and Fischer 2013: 35). Loyd (2012) suggests that the concept of structural violence is very influential, but remains under-theorized. In studies of critical social theories, researchers challenge violence concepts on the ground that violence is not simply manifested in direct and visible form (Tyner 2009). Social structures that embody violence create conditions for inequalities and destruction of life. While it is easy to classify the Cambodian genocide as direct violence, given the practice of mass execution where the actors of violence are identifiable, it is more difficult to trace the consequences of structural violence, in which disparities exist in treatment and survival.

As discussed by Tyner and others (2014), violence during DK was not simply created during the period of war; it was conditioned on the policies and practices of the government during the

post-conflict reconstruction (Tyner 2011; Tyner et al. 2014). In Cambodia, the policy put forward by the Khmer Rouge entailed a system whereby structural violence was facilitated and embedded in spatial practices. Direct violence was just one way to establish and maintain the modal or typical agricultural landscape. The everyday work conditions, poor sanitation in the camps and fields, and constant mobility of the population resulted in injuries, deaths of workers, and the spread of disease (Mitchell 2010: 150). Some studies suggest that, during the genocide, about fifty percent of the nearly two million deaths resulted directly from executions. The other half of the population died as a result of indirect factors such as starvation, lack of medical care, and overwork (Etcheson 2005; de Walque 2006; Tyner 2009, Heuveline 2001).

The consequences of structural violence during the Khmer Rouge regime are revealed in the physical mass graves, prisons, and work sites dispersed throughout the landscapes. How this violence was produced during the regime is connected to the production of space. Tyner (2014) asserts that the production of violent landscapes during DK represents the manifestation of administrative violence. Tyner discusses the consequences of administrative violence on the spatiality of death during the Khmer Rouge period. He argues that mass graves are not merely the production of direct violence, but also help us understand the administrative calculations that are implicitly materialized on the landscape (2014: 72). As he suggests, the widespread use of imprisonment, torture and execution during the Khmer Rouge regime constitutes a particular form of administrative law-making and law-preserving violence (2014:73). Following his argument, it is through those administrative practices that structural violence is enhanced. The violence involved in the process of agricultural production, for example, contributes largely to the transformation of structural violence. It is through this expansion of labor that the mass graves and remaining materialized violence are revealed on landscapes (Mitchell 2010).

The space of economic organization during the DK regime was centered on agricultural production. According to policy documents of the DK (Chandler, Kiernan and Buoa 1988; for

example the Party's Four-Year Plan), the CPK wanted to transform the country into an agrarian society through the massive transformation of space into landscapes of agricultural projects. Through these documents, coupled with survivors' narratives, it is clear that the CPK considered rice production as vital to the state's operation and economic system. Therefore the underlying planning and construction of labor camps included rice fields, canals, dams, and security centers which served its central objective of increasing the agricultural economy. This system, however, led to conditions in which structural violence and mortality became widespread. The violence was then not without foundation; it was structurally and administratively established through the systematic practices of the state's reconstruction process.

### **Landscapes of Memory and Memorialization of Violence**

The understanding of landscapes of memorialization is impacted by our understanding of memory and how it functions in the political and social realms. Memory is not merely the representation of past images, but is shaped, influenced, and affected by present events or newly-emerging social constructions (Edensor 1997: 176). Social scientists have studied memory extensively, including the politics of memory and individual and collective memories (Culbertson 1995; Steiner and Zelizer 1995; Ibreck 2010; French 2012). The importance of this research is that it demonstrates the influence of contemporary social and political relations on past memories. In her work on national sites and their relationship to the national memory at the Bannockburn Heritage Center and the Wallace Monument in Stirling [Scotland], for example, Edensor suggests that memory is not simply a particular function of a human brain, but is more "socially constructed, communicated, and institutionalized." (1997:175). Remembering becomes implicated in a range of other activities having as much to do with identity formation, power and authority, cultural norms, and social interaction as with the simple act of recall (Steiner and Zelizer 1995: 214).

### *Memory in the narratives*

Personal memories play an essential role in constructing narratives and connecting sequential events and remarkable moments across a continuum of time. Memories which are fragmented or selective may not provide an accurate representation of past events, and the human tendency for memory loss over time is also pervasive. However, memories allow people to narrate and build a connection between the present and the past. While memories of the survivors generate living documents that are at risk of being lost or damaged, in personal narratives, more than merely history, “the troubled interaction between past and present achieves a gravity that surpasses the concern with accuracy” (Langer 1991: xv). The construction of narratives through memory thus provides survivors with the opportunity to reconnect and understand their past, in relation to the present, within the context of their contemporary cultural and social norms.

While past memory is narrated and communicated through present social and political perspectives, it is in the narratives that memories of the darkest episode of a person’s life disrupts the flow of the survivor’s personal recall, specifically in the instance of genocide or other forms of mass violence. In his interviews with survivors of the Holocaust, Langer (1991) explains that while ‘common’ memory represents a smooth-flowing chronicle of personal history, ‘deep’ memory denotes the worst traumatic moments in a survivor’s life and often disrupts the normal flow of narratives. Langer states, “Testimony is a form of remembering. The faculty of memory functions in the present to recall a personal history vexed by traumas that thwart smooth-flowing chronicles. Simultaneously, however, straining against what we might call disruptive memory is an effort to reconstruct a semblance of continuity in a life that began as, and now resumes, what we would consider a normal existence.” (1991: 2).

Langer provides a memory framework to help our understanding of the memory work within oral and written narratives of survivors of genocide and mass violence. As evident in the account of a Holocaust survivor, Charlotte Delbo, these memories are simultaneously developed in

the process of trying to recall her life at Auschwitz. She said, "I live in a double existence... The double of Auschwitz doesn't disturb me or mingle in my life. As if it weren't 'me' at all. Without this split, I wouldn't have been able to come back to life." (Langer 1991: 6). However, Delbo recognized in her other written accounts that it is the voice of common memory that helps protect her life within her narrative. As a metaphor to the snakeskin, common memory acts like a 'skin of memory,' which can be erupted or burst by deep memory during the course of survivors' narratives. As Langer states, "Remembering and recording what happened operates on several levels, leaving atrocity and order in a permanently-disrupted suspension." (1991: 9). It is clear through Delbo's testimonies that, although survivors of genocide and mass violence try to work through their memories to build a narrative of sequential events, they simultaneously experience disruption in their life histories, often triggered by the most traumatic episode in their life experience.

### *Memory in the landscapes*

Past memory is closely associated with and embodied in physical space. As noted in the work of Pierre Nora (1989), memories are located in public, physical places. They are spatially constituted in concrete forms such as monuments, burial sites, cathedrals, stupas, and memorials. While these physical forms embody meanings from the past, present individual and social activities greatly affect how memory is (re)constructed on the landscape. A number of geographic studies examine the intersections of state politics, memorial sites, and spatiality of violence. Significant attention has been placed on an analysis of landscape to provide critical views regarding memorial sites. This analytic approach has been further discussed in the context of landscape formation and contestation of historical monuments and heritage sites (Lowenthal 1975; Peet 1996; Withers 1996). In addition, many studies have examined the ways in which social groups or individuals who were exterminated under violent regimes (such as the Nazi regime) have been politically memorialized in landscapes. Rudy Koshar notes in his study of the evolution of Germany's memory

landscapes that the memory ingrained in monuments, memorials, historical sites or commemorations helps build narratives of the past (2000:9). Therefore, it is at the intersection of space and memory that the discussion of memory landscapes becomes relevant.

The existing literature relating to landscapes of memory primarily addresses the memorialization of landscape in conjunction with a nation's reconstruction of memory, particularly the memory of violence and the related politics of memory (Foote 2003; Charlesworth 1994; Dwyer 2000, 2004; Dwyer and Alderman 2008; Tyner et al. 2012, Alderman and Inwood 2013). These studies address the meanings of violence and disputes over memorial sites, whether or not they represent actual history and past collective memories. In some instances, as discussed in Dwyer's (2004) study of memorial sites of the Civil Rights Movement in the American South, the political influence of memorials produces a sense of obligation for people to remember certain aspects of the past while forgetting other aspects. In this case, memorialization diverted people's attention to a particular memory at the expense of the whole (Dwyer 2004: 423). In addition, as contended in the studies of memory of violence and place, memorialization of violence on the landscape is not merely for the sake of individuals or groups who are impacted by the violence, but is "a tool to bolster different aims and agendas" (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004: 349).

Following the fall of the DK regime in 1979, two sites of violence—the Tuol Sleng Khmer Rouge prison and the Choeung Ek killing fields—were rapidly converted into official memorials for genocide remembrance. Consequently, the public landscape has been used and reused to serve the politics of memory, reinforcing the observation by Dwyer and Alderman that "historical representation is not only a product of social power but also a tool or resource for achieving it." (2008: 171). The commemoration of the past conforms to the dominant narratives of the particular social groups or actors who wish to narrate that past. The link between past and present is significant in the sense that the contestation of politics and memory is manifested on the landscape. However, the landscapes in which past violence are embodied are not all memorialized and, most



frequently, are lived-in spaces. They are quotidian spaces inhabited by those who experienced the violence. Therefore, the ability to remember the past as illustrated in the landscapes is limited and concealed behind the daily living of the survivors. The discussion will now be directed to the landscapes of everyday life.

### **Trauma and Landscapes of Everyday Life**

While landscapes are ingrained with past memory, especially those of violence, the elements of people's everyday lives are often excluded. Besides serving a healing role, memorials continue to be regarded as sacred places (Schramm 2011: 12). This is also true for some Holocaust memorials that are often viewed as pilgrimage sites by international visitors who visit with their families (Williams 2004: 243). In Cambodia, the state-built memorial sites such as Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Memorial are less likely to be places for private tributes due to the organization of the institutions (Hughes 2008). In this respect, people's experiences in the space is reconstructed and limited to meeting a particular purpose of the state. Unlike most of the unmarked sites, the memorialized places are not living or working locations for people on a daily basis. The sites serve as pilgrimage spaces as well as historical markers for local and international visitors.

Studies of everyday life have recently become more prevalent in the literature of geographic and social studies. Nevertheless, there is no consensus of definition regarding the concept of everyday life. Geographies of everyday life may simply be defined as places in which everyday activities occur (Holloway and Hubbard 2001). In this sense, "everyday" refers to the routine behaviors that occur in the places where people conduct their necessary activities. Geographers tend to disregard the importance of everyday in an attempt to document exceptional and new experiences (Duncan 1993). Ben Highmore (2004) provides the meaning for routine as a central feature of everyday life. Although he is concerned that the range of experiences associated with the

routine is often overlooked in cultural and social studies, he addresses them by discussing the experiential aspects of human life in various studies. He defines everyday life as everyday activities in modernity as characterized by the repetitive routine of everyday work. Sociologist Laura Bovone (1989) discusses the originality of the concept in the area of critical theories. She defines everyday life as a context in which the meaning of society is generated. Under these conditions, Boyone explores the various ways in which meanings are evidenced in everyday life. Although the concept of everyday life has received increasing attention from geographers and social scientists, studies of everyday experiences in the context of war and violence remain limited.

In the emerging literature of everyday experiences in war, feminist studies place greater attention on experiences of ordinary people, especially those of women. These studies critically examine the personal experiences of civilians and assess the general omission of discussion about such topics from the study of war (see Alison & Miranda 2009; MacKenzie 2012; Sylvester 2013; Tyner & Henkin 2014). From an international relations perspective, Sylvester is concerned that wars are viewed merely as state-level affairs, not social institutions, thus studies of war and violence frequently disregard the war-time experiences of ordinary people and the impact of war on their daily lives.

In addition to the study of ordinary experiences in the context of war, the everyday experiences of men and women and their relationship to memories of violence in post-conflict societies have been addressed in only a few studies. In Kwon's research about Vietnamese civilians who experienced mass violence (2009), their remembrance of death was manifested in ritual practices—an informal practice by ordinary Vietnamese. This study indicates that memories are not necessarily demonstrated in concrete materialistic forms in landscapes; they can be embodied in non-material practices such as rituals and social activities, religious ceremonies, or Remembrance Day. Likewise, anthropological research by Anne Yvonne Guillou (2012; 2013) examines local practices of remembrance of mass deaths based upon common religious systems.

She contends that state-built memorials and related commemorations are not particularly connected to local people (2013:266-267). Instead, people have used their religious and social systems as tools through which they process past memories and healing from social suffering (Guillou 2012).

The relationship of place and memory in the context of the Cambodian genocide has also been studied by the psychologist Peg LeVine (2010). Her study examines how memories of Khmer Rouge survivors are influenced by places. LeVine documented life stories of survivors related to their weddings and births during the Khmer Rouge regime. She accompanied survivors to the places where they were married and gave birth and asked them to narrate their experiences. She found that men and women who returned to their wedding or birth places had the potential to express different levels of feelings while recalling their past memories (2010: 6). LeVine used film to document the reflections of men and women about places they had not visited for more than thirty years. Her work indicates how geography helps survivors recollect past events, even though most of the survivors in her study were not able to describe their recalled events in sequential order. The discussion regarding sequential order in narratives, particularly as it pertains to deep memory, is reinforced in the work of Langer (1991). He explains that the sequential order or even the mere chronology of past events is constantly disrupted by the most horrendous episode of the past. This 'deep' memory disrupts the flow and normalcy of the story, which ultimately impacts the way in which survivors narrate their personal histories (Langer 1991). The traumatic moments, which are present in the narratives of others as well, make their way through the common memory to the surface of the narratives and interrupt the sequence of the storytelling. At the surface level, these two memories appear to differ between the account and evocation. However more essentially, these narratives often reproduce a sense of oneself as it existed in the past (Langer 1991). This became evident through an examination of survivors' accounts as considered in the context of specific geography and larger narratives.

As illustrated by previous research, attempts to assimilate tragic deaths into the full spectrum of village ritual life are significant in the process of remembering and forgetting past violence (Kwon 2006: 4). Importantly, they also illustrate intimate experiences of men and women in violent landscapes as a manifestation of the geographies of everyday life in the context of a post-conflict society. While Kwon (2006) and Guillou (2012, 2013) discuss social practices of mass death in the context of spiritual and domestic ritual space, and LeVine specifically examines survivors' memories of weddings, births, and other rituals during the Khmer Rouge regime, this study will focus on mundane day-to-day experiences in the past and present landscapes of violence among Cambodian survivors. Articulated in the discussion of Holloway & Hubbard (2001) and Ben Higmore (2010), this study seeks to examine the nexus of everyday experiences of Khmer Rouge survivors among sites of mass violence as informed by their past memories. The narrative approach is effective for gaining an understanding into the everyday life of survivors. In particular, narratives that have been formed by memories may be influenced by contemporary social, political, and cultural circumstances. Current experiences of individuals, whether violent or not, are informed by and also inform their past memories. Many survivors of genocide and other forms of mass violence may find their narration disrupted by their deep memories—the memories of their most horrendous and traumatic life experiences. While one aspect of the subsequent discussion centers on the experiences of people on a day-to-day basis, other aspects will concentrate on the experiences that are concealed behind the invisible landscapes of violence.

### **Chapter Three: Scope of Study, Narratives, Positionality**

This thesis enquires into the lived experiences of survivors among landscapes of violence. It reconstructs the day-to-day activities of survivors in the violent landscapes to provide an understanding of the impact of genocide on the lives of survivors. The research intends to make two significant contributions: 1) it examines articulated experiences of survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime to determine their spatial experiences, memories of the genocide, and the nature of their living experiences during and after the genocide years; and 2) examines how living in a landscape of violence impacts and is impacted by their memories. Through the documentation of their life histories and the analyses of their stories, this study approaches their experiences from the vantage point of living space.

With these purposes in mind, the main methodology I employ for this thesis is narrative analysis, although there are other significant elements included in the method of data collection and analysis. Engagement in narratives allows us to probe deeply into people's lives and define the process through which individuals attribute meaning to their lives. Narrative has been broadly employed by researchers as a research methodology within a variety of disciplines in the social sciences to understand culture and individuals (Colyar and Holley 2010: 72). Perhaps most notable is the work of Polkinghorne (1988) and Bruner (1986), wherein narrative is a tool which allows researchers to work through the process of meaning-making and explaining human perception (Colyar and Holley 2010: 72). Narrative has been defined and employed in a great variety of ways in geographic studies (see Riley and Harvey, 2007); however, in a simplified definition, "narrative is the telling (or retelling) of a story or set of events in a specific time sequence. The elements of story,

character, focalization, and plot shape how the narrative is organized and presented to the reader”(Colyar and Holley 2010: 73). The study of narrative has conceptually and methodologically been effective in reflecting perspectives of individual daily experiences. The approach in understanding such perspective works through “what is said and what is not said, within the context in which life is lived and the context of the interview in which words are spoken to represent that life.” (Josselson & Lieblich 1995: ix). Researchers “actively engage in studying some aspect of ‘everyday social life’ by using narratives as a tool of inquiry”(Josselson & Lieblich 1995: x). In the context of daily experiences, narratives allow for studies of human life and interpretation of human experiences from different perspectives within certain contexts and circumstances.

Engaging in narrative through in-depth interviews is important for this study because I am able to seek the perspectives of individuals by asking for their life stories. As Susan Chase (1995: 2) notes, “If we take seriously the idea that people make sense of experience and communicate meaning through narration, *then in-depth interviews should become occasions in which we ask for life stories*” (emphasis in original). By examining life stories of individuals drawn from the interviews, I am able to gain insight into those experiences that are most important and meaningful to them. I am also able to discern the meaning of experiences through their mundane everyday activities in a spatial and social context, which is often neglected in dominant social discourse. Thus this study is predominantly concerned with individual lived experiences during the genocide years and the post-genocide era in connection with the landscape of violence. My methodology has focused on emerging themes from personal narratives, situated in the broadly conceptual context of memory, place, and everydayness. Field work was utilized to access and analyze the site itself, textual, oral narratives of the site and individual survivors involved in their everyday activities on the site.

In the following discussion, I outline my methodological approaches to data collection and analysis. Then I discuss the rationale for the site selection, an overview of the site, a note on the interview process, and my positionality as a researcher.

## **Methodology**

This research involves methods for data collection, including archival research at DC-Cam and ethnographic fieldwork. During the fieldwork, in-depth interviews and site observations were utilized as the primary means of collecting information (see Hill 1993; Rubin and Rubin 1995; DeWalt and DeWalt 2010; Hay 2010). From a geographic perspective, these methods are applied to collect narratives of the experiences of people living among the landscapes during and after the genocide years. A combination of these methods has provided me with more effective data cross-reference. For example, data obtained from interviews can be triangulated the observation and the information in DC-Cam's documents.

### *Archival research*

The archival data provides critical information relating to the historical background of the DK regime's policies and practices. The data constitutes primary information, which is fundamental to the research analysis. DC-Cam has archived nearly a million pages of documents related to the Khmer Rouge regime. Their archives contain primary documents (paper documents, photographs, documentary footage left behind by the Khmer Rouge regime), as well as secondary documents (geographic data detailing sites of Khmer Rouge prisons, burials, and mass graves; and interviews with survivors and former Khmer Rouge cadres produced after 1979). For the purpose of this thesis, I utilize both primary and secondary documents, including documents related to policies on the regime's agricultural production and labor and DC-Cam's reports and interview transcripts. The data in this research has been derived from the documents, certain portions of which have been used as a source of information for my own interviews.

### *Interviews and participant observations*

In addition to archival research, I incorporate in-depth interviews in the research to collect life stories of both male and female survivors who lived through the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975-1979. In order to document their life experiences during and after the genocide, interviews have been approached from a life history perspective. I use both semi-structured and unstructured interview techniques to allow room for in-depth narratives and flexibility. The former allows me to cover particular subjects, while leaving space for participants to provide their personal perceptions and life histories (Dunn 2010). The latter offers a way in which I can record first-hand knowledge and experiences of interviewees, especially memories associated with places (George and Stratford 2010; Roberson 2006). It also allows for open-ended questions and for participants to feel comfortable while speaking. Although I have designed my own list of topics for the interviews, I allowed interviewees to discuss their own topics at the beginning of the interviews to put them at ease and allow for an effective flow of conversation. Based on my experiences interviewing survivors, flexibility and informality in the beginning of interviews is important to make interviewees feel comfortable and build trust with me as an interviewer. The conversation begins with either their current life situation or childhood life, and continues from the DK regime to the post-DK era to reveal their past experiences. Their life histories have been well articulated through the interview process.

The topics for the interviews focused primarily on the life histories of interviewees from prior-1975 until today, as well as the history of the sites in which they worked and lived during DK. While information about the studied site has been obtained in part from documents held at DC-Cam, additional data relating to the history and ongoing development of the sites has been gathered through the interviews.

I recorded the interviews instead of taking notes in order to give my full attention to participants' stories, engage in the conversations, ask follow-up questions, and observe body language. Recording the interviews also eased my concern over the possibility of missing a



particular part of an interview and provided me with an adequate means of preserving the original words of participants. The recorded interviews have been transcribed in Khmer and translated into English. I used selected parts of the transcripts to examine themes of the study.

The geography and accessibility of the commune allowed me to travel to the village from Phnom Penh daily to conduct my interviews. Despite this accessibility, I decided to stay in Boeng Krachap Cheung Village with the village chief's family during my fieldwork. I conducted three extensive visits during which I stayed overnight in the village. I also made several daily commutes, during which I conducted investigations into various Khmer Rouge sites. I commuted from the city to the commune by rental car and then rode a motorbike with a local villager to visit the sites and meet with my informants. My main activities during the field trip included conducting interviews; visiting a Khmer Rouge prison and work sites revealed to me by an interviewee and by local authorities; visiting other associated sites such as mass graves, Khmer Rouge district and commune offices, warehouses, hospitals, and schools. I located the visited sites on the map using a Global Positioning System (GPS). I used approximately three-quarters of my time in the village to conduct interviews, while one-quarter of my time was devoted to participant observation and site visits.

The commune in which I conducted the study is a location in which I had previously organized DC-Cam village forums in 2012. My previous work in the commune allowed me to become familiar with the village residents and authorities. These prior relationships facilitated my field research to a great extent, enabling me to establish direct contact with the commune and village chiefs, as well as to make direct contact with most of the interviewees. Also, having existing relationships enabled me to easily build trust with my study participants. Staying in the village and participating in a few daily activities of the villagers greatly assisted me in building rapport and deepening my relationships with the interviewees.

In addition to interviews, I incorporate brief participant observations in my fieldwork. Studying everyday experiences requires that we move beyond one-off formalized interactions with

participants (Kearns 2000). To be able to collect data that provides a flow of everyday life in time and space, Evans suggests that researchers participate in everyday interactions of villagers (Kearns 2000). Thus, I participated in some daily activities with my participants and stayed in the villages where the interviews were conducted in order to gain maximum insight into hidden aspects of their experiences, which they may not be able to articulate in interviews. Although my research timeline was limited and would not allow me to use this method extensively, I briefly participated in some activities, including village events and the rhythm of daily activities of participants. In particular, I managed to observe the daily activities of several key participants and made home visits to most participants. Villagers also accompanied me in visiting various Khmer Rouge sites in the area.

#### *Selection and recruitment of participants*

I recruited 25 participants for this study, although not all information from the interviews is utilized in this thesis. I selected participants based on their age, experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime, and in-depth knowledge of the site and the villages. Firstly, in accordance with the aims of the research, participants are survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime or former Khmer Rouge cadres who are over 45 years old and possess extensive knowledge and memory of the regime. Secondly, the men and women selected for this research had first-hand experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime, such as imprisonment, torture, forced labor in the rice fields or in dam construction. Learning about their past experiences enabled me to gather their insights and interactions among the landscapes of their present everyday life. Lastly, I interviewed both survivors who have been living in the village since pre-1975 to today as well as those who were evacuated to Pursat and Battambang during the DK regime and returned home afterward. My study site is composed mostly of former base people. Many new people were moved or transferred to the Northwestern region of the country during the second wave of evacuations in 1976. I also

interviewed former base people to learn about their experiences relative to the administration of the Khmer Rouge within the village and their insights into Khmer Rouge society.

Aside from participants with whom I had personally made contact, I requested assistance from the commune and village chiefs in identifying participants who might be potential informants for the research. The chiefs are usually the primary source of general knowledge and information about the village and the background information of villagers. Before and upon my arrival in the field, I checked with my contacts in order to identify villagers who might satisfy my selection criteria. I then asked the village chiefs to introduce me to the potential participants. Before conducting the interviews, I provided the interviewees with an explanation of the research and IRB approval for further references and asked for their consent to participate in my research. I also used the snowball technique to identify additional participants for the research. This whole process was repeated throughout the period of the field interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

As articulated in the preceding discussion, specific analytical tools are utilized to analyze the policies and practices of the DK regime in constructing violent landscapes throughout Cambodia, the detailed narratives of the survivors living and working on those violent sites, and the connection of their everyday lives and the memory of violence.

The first objective is to reconstruct the production of violent landscapes in Cambodia. This is accomplished through an engagement with Khmer Rouge policies and practices and how the killing and deaths of almost two million people represent particular violent landscapes. By referencing DC-Cam-archived materials detailing the distribution of security centers, mass graves, and burial sites, I reconstruct the process through which the site was established and operated, as well as examine the experiences of those who lived among those sites. The distribution of these

violent sites provides important insights into the daily living conditions of people who lived among them. Information obtained from the interviews with regard to the operation of the prison site and associated mass graves is employed to provide analysis into this thesis.

My other objectives are to provide detailed narratives of survivors who currently live within these violent landscapes and to consider the impact of living and working among those sites on memories of the violence. These will be constructed through a discussion of survivors' narratives based on the interviews I collected. Consequently, the construction of life histories as a particular approach in life narrative studies has significant implications for understanding subsequent attempts to promote understanding of daily experiences of survivors and the process of reconciliation. Life histories seek to enrich our understanding of everyday life and the condition of human experience at the level of day-to-day activities. It places human experiences within a context so that we can interpret and provide meaning to the life stories. The analysis relies on themes that emerge from the interview data. Drawing on the narrative approach, analyzing data relating to the lived experiences of survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime are crucial for these objectives. In an attempt to understand the complexity and fluidity of everyday life, the life histories approach can reveal different and changing facets of people's experiences (Meth and McClymont 2009). This is important for research that seeks to understand the dynamic and incomplete nature of the life experiences of a population (Morrison 2012).

For the purpose of this thesis, narratives of individual survivors drawn from the interviews will be analyzed following two coding strategies: descriptive and analytic. Cope (2003) provides insightful suggestions for coding field notes, transcripts and documents, selecting themes, and interpreting emerging themes. In descriptive coding, interviewees' own words are used as coding words. Many participants provide details of these themes in their interviews. Analytic codes come from an interpretation of descriptive codes and connect to theoretical literature (Cope 2003). For instance, emerging descriptive themes may include hard labor, execution, communal eating,

interrogation, starvation, evacuation, commemoration, or new and base people. They can be categorized under main themes, including memory of new and base people, landscape of memory, memorialization, direct and structural violence, and traumatic experiences in everyday life. The method of data analysis involves: 1) coding of interview transcripts and field notes during which the themes emerge and 2) focusing on the themes and interpreting the results.

### **A Note Regarding the Interviews**

All of the interviews took place in Prek Ta Meak Commune, Ksach Kandal District, Kandal Province, the location which I selected for the study. The way in which interviewees constructed their narratives was significantly influenced by the geographical and historical background, current social relations, and shared experiences of the villagers. The narratives might have been differently read, I believe, if the interviews had been gathered in a location different from that in which the social and cultural memories were constructed. The survivors I interviewed lived through the regime while living at the same location, however, their particular spatial and temporal experiences might have been distinguished by differing treatment from the Khmer Rouge cadres and the distinct personal background of individual survivors. Similarly, the experiences of those living and working among the sites of mass violence are not commonly shared by all survivors who lived in the same commune during the Khmer Rouge regime.

The differing effects of past traumatic experiences on one's memories and current interaction with space cannot be overstated. Although some survivors were living in the same village at the time of the interviews, their memories of past events were shaped by their current living conditions and institutionalized construct of the memories of the nation. For some survivors, the way in which survivors cope with experiences from the past impacts how they interact with space in the present. For example, elderly survivors from a village usually use Buddhism to explain past events and the reason why they experienced those events the way they did, while younger

survivors who have been more exposed to national reconstruction react to the violent acts as a consequence of a political decision and policies set forth by the regime's government.

My interviewees primarily include elderly survivors who were subjected fully and directly to hard labor and various other experiences during the genocidal regime. Certain numbers of younger survivors endured similar tragic events, but were too young to remember and understand those events. This study, then, is not premised on the notion of random samples of participants based solely on age or gender. Instead, interviewees are consciously selected based on the kinds of experiences and the degree to which survivors were involved in particular experiences. For example, former prisoners of the local security center were specifically selected as interviewees because they had first-hand experiences in the prison and those experiences might have better informed their present experiences. The Khmer Rouge village chiefs and unit chiefs were also interviewed to acquire information on the overall lower-level structure of the villages and working operations executed in the landscape.

The specifics of survivor background and experience lead me to suggest that a type of experience in the past led the narrator toward a set of interactions in space in the present. Particular events that occurred at a temporal and spatial point could influence the ways in which survivors experience space in the present day. They do not suggest that past memory is the only defining factor which determines the relationship of survivors in space in the present.

Conducting interviews for this study was a traumatizing, challenging, and insightful experience. The trauma resulted in large part from listening and becoming personally involved in the stories narrated by the interviewees. It required me to confront their tragic life stories and re-experience their life histories. In order to gain insight from the interviews, I frequently found myself experiencing flashbacks of memories of my own family. This phenomenon provided me with repeated opportunities to reflect on my personal family history, which is embedded in me and has shaped the person I am today. Challenges and frustrations arose from the difficulty in trying to

assist interviewees in reconstructing their personal memories. My direct questions and the open-ended conversations that prompted interviewees to talk at length of their experiences was often frustrating for me since I felt that I was evoking painful memories for them. The insights I obtained from the stories emerged from their eagerness to share their traumatic experiences, regardless of how it made them feel afterward, and how innocent I was in terms of first-hand experiences pertaining to the Khmer Rouge period. It is impossible for me as a member of the second generation of Cambodian genocide survivors to share the emotions and perspectives of those survivors whom I interviewed. Nonetheless, in the context of the interviews, I tried to comprehend their stories, especially the experiences through which they lived as described by their narratives.

### **Struggling with Positionality**

Personal experiences help inform my position as a researcher. The interviewees are the first generation of the genocide, whereas I am not. I did not live through the genocide and did not have first-hand experiences during the genocide. However, my immediate family members—parents and brothers—have lived through the regime and their experiences have informed me and shape the positions I set forth in my thesis.

As the youngest child and only daughter among my four siblings, I was born three years after the genocide. Even after the passage of more than thirty years, the experience of genocide has not faded from my family's memories. It has had a profound influence on their lives and the impact of their memories has been transferred to me and shaped the person I am today. As a researcher, my positionality and personal and professional backgrounds greatly impacts my field experiences and my interpretation of this thesis.

Researchers in social sciences have frequently discussed positionality in their studies, contrasting the subjectivity versus objectivity of social science research. Increasing attention on

social critical theories has prompted researchers to consider not only scientific methodology, but also personal perspectives and positionality. Positionality is defined as the personal and cultural background and socio-economic characteristics of a researcher. It refers to “aspects of identity in terms of race, class, gender, caste, sexuality and other attributes that are markers or relational positions in society, rather than intrinsic qualities” (Chacko 2004). “Positionality is a critical factor in framing social and professional relationships in the field; it sets the tone for the research, affecting its course and its outcomes” (Chacko 2004). My experiences in the field not only reflect my identity as a member of the second generation of Khmer Rouge survivors, but also as an outsider of the first generation. This identity reveals two significant implications for my research: (1) the participants in my research who represent the first generation of the genocidal regime were very willing to share their stories with me in an attempt to educate me as a member of the younger generation, and (2) the participants are indirectly related to me, since I am the daughter of fellow survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime. Thus I share a partial common identity with them, and these dual benefits allowed me to connect with my participants in a meaningful way that only my participants and I can fully appreciate.

Although my status offered mutual connections, it also presented some challenges. As a researcher and a member of the post-genocide generation, Khmer Rouge experiences are most familiar to me through my family’s story. My parents have been my primary source of knowledge about the regime, even before I learned about it from other sources. I have therefore internalized my own perspective regarding the Khmer Rouge. I have a negative view of the regime and the way in which the Khmer Rouge treated its population. Knowledge of the Khmer Rouge experiences became personalized as a part of me. I can only imagine being a different person if it were not the Khmer Rouge who shaped my family and contemporary Cambodian society today. My personal experience shaped the way in which I reacted to particular stories and the questions that I asked my participants. From one perspective, it was helpful for me to shape my questions based on my



personal background and emotional connection to the subject matter. However, from a different perspective, it influenced my decisions regarding which stories to collect and which to omit. Since I was more familiar with victims' stories, I subconsciously minimized some of the important elements that might be helpful to answer my research questions. At the same time, I tended to downplay justifications expressed by former Khmer Rouge members and kept doubting the truthfulness of their narratives.

Through my ongoing work with DC-Cam, I have learned the tragic life stories of Cambodian victims who endured the Khmer Rouge regime and how they managed to survive. Their powerful stories broadened my knowledge of the regime and inspired me in many different ways. It motivated me to try to better understand my family's experiences. Having listened to their stories, I gained a better understanding of the living conditions during the genocide years. People did not have food to fill their stomach, let alone any food to waste. I have gradually come to realize that my family's experience represents only one piece of a much larger puzzle, the totality of which will ultimately form an historical record to present a clearer picture of what happened during the period of genocide. For survivors whose generation is aging and has quickly become a minority segment of society, it is important to ensure that their stories are remembered and recorded for future generations.

The above challenges do not present obstacles to my ability to interact and acquire the necessary research information. As a young female researcher, both my personal and professional experiences have broadened my views and improved my interaction with my participants. Since I also have some knowledge about my own family's similar experiences, the interviews became more interactive and conversational. Instead of just asking the participants questions, I related my parents' experiences, some of which overlapped with theirs, and in this way helped them to connect with me. My professional experiences were also particularly helpful. I was a field researcher for DC-Cam for many years. My work with DC-Cam, in particular the experiences obtained from talking

to survivors who lived in many different parts of the country, helped me relate to my participants through the sharing of experiences, both geographically and emotionally.

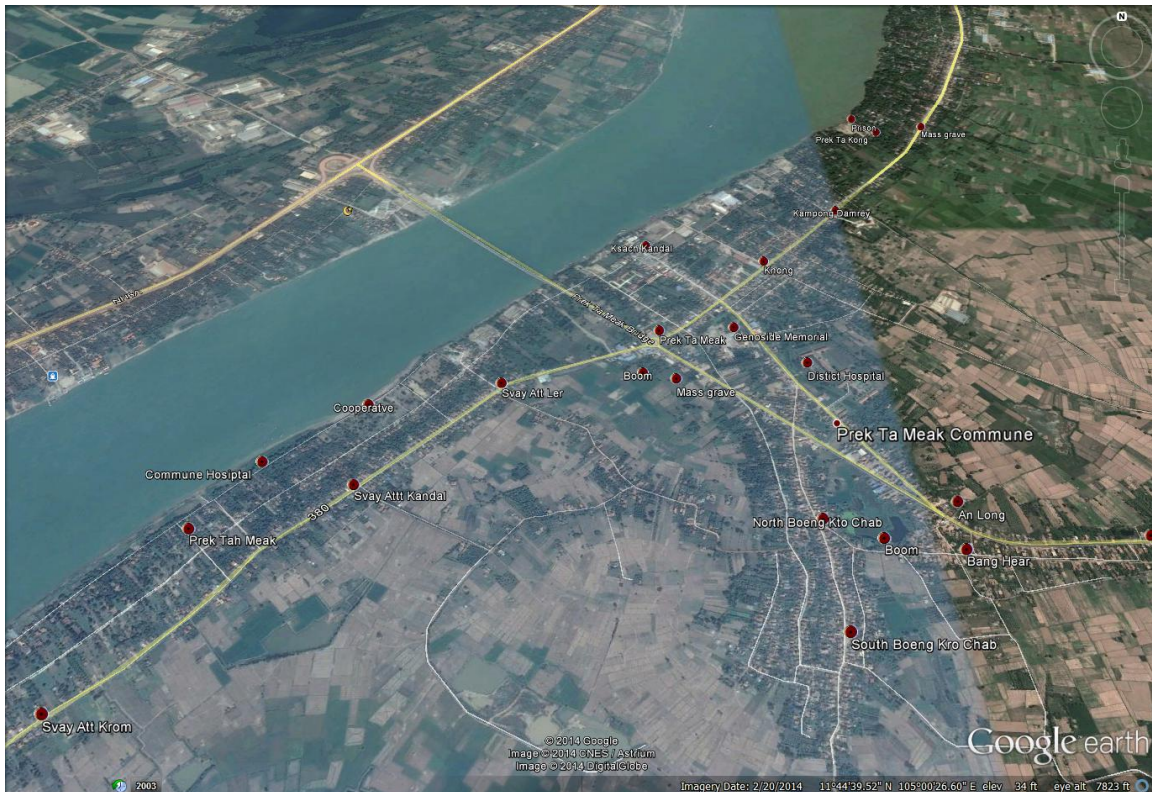
## **Setting, Study Area, Background**

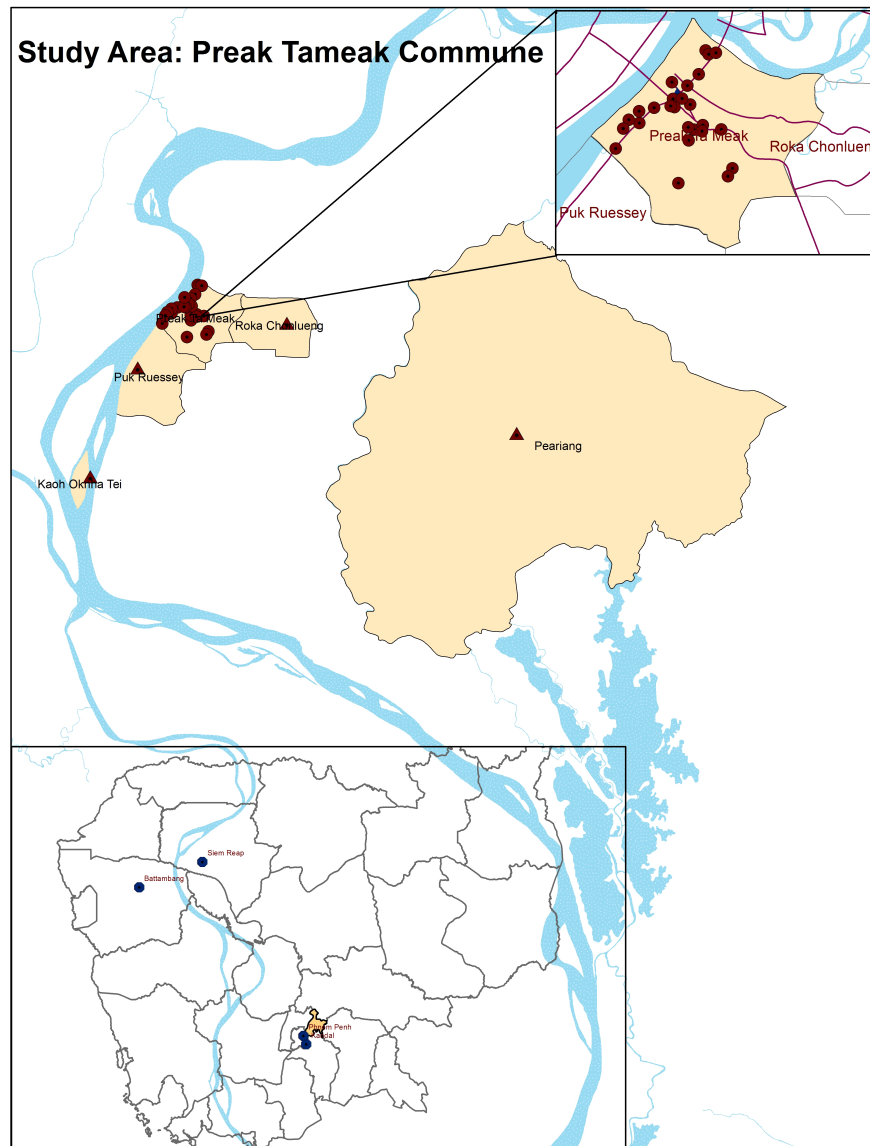
### *Selection and overview of the study site*

This research examines the experiences of Khmer Rouge survivors who live in close proximity to a former Khmer Rouge prison site, Chamkar Siv, located in Prek Ta Meak Commune, Ksach Kandal District, Kandal Province. Chamkar Siv was the Khmer Rouge security center for Khsach Kandal District, Kandal Province, and was an important site for which I collected information through the interview process for my research. This particular site was selected for this study for two reasons. First, little or no physical evidence remains at the site to suggest the violence that was perpetrated there. The former prison location and the houses that have since been removed were used by the Khmer Rouge to detain, interrogate and torture prisoners, yet no evidence of that use remains in the landscape. The prison remains ‘absent-present’ in that, although it is not physically part of the landscape, it continues to have an effect on the survivors who live there through their memory. Second, despite being unmarked by evidence of past violence, the site is significant in that it exhibits the direct and structural violence that took place during the regime. Those who passed through the Chamkar Siv Prison were interrogated and tortured, while other villagers in the surrounding area were forced to labor for long hours without adequate food or medical care. Understanding the depraved living and working conditions that victims endured is important for gaining a deeper understanding of how violence was structurally infused in society during the regime. My interviews with survivors living near this site will provide insight into how their experiences of past violence are reflected in their present everyday lives. The Chamkar Siv

prison site will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapter. Now I will briefly turn the discussion to the geographic and socio-economic setting of Prek Ta Meak Commune.

Prek Ta Meak Commune is situated along the Mekong River, approximately 30 kilometers northeast of the capital city of Phnom Penh. The commune is directly accessible from the city through National Road 6 and the Prek Ta Meak Bridge, which was built in 2008. With new bridge and road accessibility, the commune has developed fast and become partially urbanized, especially in terms of infrastructure. Main roads within the commune were repaired and paved in concrete for villagers to commute within and between villages. Electricity and a clean water supply became accessible, although they are relatively costly compared to Phnom Penh, the nearest urban region. A village chief in Boeng Krachap Cheung Village informed me that this new infrastructure will help improve the living conditions and local businesses of residents in his village. The villagers have access to clean water, which will help promote a healthy lifestyle. The villagers have the ability to run their family businesses conveniently and receive relatively fast access to news and information from outside of the village. Despite its closeness to the capital city and the increased accessibility, the village is not fully urbanized although it is not neatly conformed into 'rural' community by the description in May Ebihara's study (1968). In her study of Svay Village in Kandal Province during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the geographical proximity of a Khmer village to a city does not guarantee extensively urbanized life within the village. Instead, while the "villagers are more cognizant of urban affairs and styles than people in the hinterlands...urbanization, in the sense of the city impact on the countryside, is still relatively limited" (Ebihara 1968: 11).





**Figure 2: An overview map of the research location (Source: Author)**

Traditionally, the people of this region were farmers who cultivated wet and dry rice, grew fruits and vegetables, and cultivated crops on farms. They were also traders and producers of weaved mat products. It was common for local villagers to grow raw materials for mat weaving or collect the required materials from the neighboring villages. The mat produced in this region has been popular and generally recognized for its quality among Cambodians. Today, few local villagers

continue to earn a living by weaving mats. Those who continue the practice are usually hired by foreign business people, mostly Vietnamese. Workers earn money based on the number of mats they produce. The raw materials are supplied and their employers collect the entire amount of finished product. Mat weaving has been a traditional source of income for the locals. As demand and corresponding profits have decreased, mat weaving has declined and is now limited only to the villages of Boeung Krachap Cheung and Boeung Krachap Tbong. Most villagers have turned to different business opportunities according to the economic conditions of the country; in large part they have expanded their businesses into the urban areas (e.g. Phnom Penh). For example, grass planting has become increasingly popular among the villagers because of high demand for grass in Phnom Penh. This business also allows people to remain closer to home. Due to rapid urban growth and city expansion, demand for the product is high. This business has provided the villagers with reasonable profits and incentives, while not requiring them to travel to accomplish their work.

#### *Local history of Prek Ta Meak Commune*

In the early 1970s, after the coup d'état, Prek Ta Meak Commune experienced intense fighting between the armed forces of the Khmer Rouge and the Lon Nol government. In addition to this armed confrontation, American bombers attacked the villages and destroyed many houses and infrastructure. Local residents recall the bombardment and the fighting. Some residents fled the bombing and fighting to seek refuge in Phnom Penh or in neighboring communes located further east of the Mekong River. A Phnom Penh evacuee, who had originally lived in Kampong Damrei Village, described the situation during that period:

The armed forces of the Khmer Liberation Movement or the Khmer Rouge Revolutionary Movement fought against the Lon Nol government forces. To escape the armed conflict, my family decided to move to Phnom Penh. ... We fled to Phnom Penh along with other local villagers who were trying to escape the armed conflict in our commune. First, we moved to Ta Khmao [Kandal Province] where I continued studying in school for three years. Then we moved to Phnom Penh, where I attended Tuol Svay Prey High School, the site which the Khmer Rouge turned into a prison and torture center. (Interview with Chamroeun, July 22, 2014)

Conscription into the Khmer Rouge army was common among youth in the village during the period. A villager who was 10 years old at that time witnessed the armed recruitment of his teachers. He recalled that he was unable to attend school or study with a teacher regularly. Instead, teachers between the ages of 17 and 19 years were either forcibly conscripted or voluntarily joined the Khmer Rouge movement to fight against the Lon Nol regime. Because the village became increasingly chaotic, many residents were forced to make a decision whether to join the Khmer Rouge movement and stay within the region controlled by them or flee to an area controlled by Lon Nol forces.

According to the accounts of villagers, the Khmer Rouge was not able to establish full control over the villages of Prek Ta Meak until 1975. Despite being situated in the midst of the battle, Lon Nol forces retained control and officially occupied the commune until the Khmer Rouge victory on April 17, 1975. While villagers fled to Phnom Penh or to nearby communes to escape the fighting, the armies of the Khmer Rouge and Lon Nol continued to attack each other.

After the Khmer Rouge defeated the Lon Nol government in 1975, Prek Ta Meak Commune was administratively organized as part of Region 22 in the Eastern Zone of the DK regime. The Eastern Zone had been established and controlled by the Khmer Rouge revolutionary movement before their victory on April 17, 1975. The local residents lived under the leadership of the Zone secretary, Sao Phim. At the commune level, the villagers remembered the commune leader, Sangkat (commune chief) Kiang, who was very well-known. He led Prek Ta Meak commune until 1977, when he was arrested and executed at Chamkar Siv Prison, not far from the place where he had worked.

The situation in the commune and throughout the entire zone deteriorated when the central leadership became suspicious of a conspiracy between the Eastern Zone and the state enemy, Vietnam. The central leaders ordered a zone purge under the accusation of treason. This

purge led to forced evacuations, arrests, and the execution of several hundred thousand Khmer Rouge officials within the zone, especially high level cadres, who were sent to the top security center of S-21 in Phnom Penh. Others were forcibly evacuated to the Northwest Zone and subjected to hard labor or fled to other communes to escape from arrest or execution. Within one month of 1978, for instance, approximately 400 cadres from the Eastern Zone were arrested and imprisoned at S-21. Kong, who was recruited into the medical department of Ksach Kandal District during the DK regime and served as a Khmer Rouge assistant nurse from 1977 to 1978, described the situation in Prek Ta Meak commune during the purge:

The country went through two stages of governance. In the first stage, I was recruited to work in a hospital by the Eastern Zone authorities. ... I was living a relatively peaceful life; suddenly, when the central level people arrived, they accused me of betraying Angkar [the faceless organization of the Khmer Rouge]. They began researching my biography and intended to send me for reeducation. ...Back then, reeducation meant death. If you were sent for reeducation, it meant you were being sent to death. They started to completely purge our region, but I was lucky that they didn't send me [for reeducation]. I was very careful in my actions. I was also very lucky because the Khmer Rouge [regime] was overthrown by Vietnamese forces not long after the chaos. (Author's interview, July 22, 2014)

In 1979, Prek Ta Meak was liberated from Khmer Rouge control by the KUFNS front with assistance from Vietnamese forces. In describing the scene, villagers said that they could hear gunshots from all directions. The sounds came closer and closer to the village in early January 1979. By January 6<sup>th</sup>, they witnessed many Khmer Rouge soldiers running from an easterly direction in fear. The villagers were anxious and confused by the situation and unsure regarding what was going to happen to them and to the village. As they noticed more and more Khmer Rouge soldiers running through the village, as well as some local cadres fleeing the village, the local villagers became increasingly certain that a change to the country was imminent. Some Khmer Rouge members who were infamous for perpetrating direct violence against the local villagers escaped from the village and



have never been seen again. Other base and new people remained in the village and continued to live alongside each other.

## **Chapter Four: Sites of Violence, Narratives, and Memorialization**

### **Sites of Violence and Narratives**

Landscape and memory are interrelated and have been well-researched among academics in the field of geography and other allied fields. The scholarship extends the discussion from individual and social memories to the politics of memories and its representation on the landscapes (Foote 2003, Lowenthal 1975, Till 2004, Dwyer and Alderman 2008; Moore 2009; Alderman 2009; Alderman and Inwood 2013). As discussed in chapter two, most concerns regarding the attempt to memorialize violence are related to the politics of memory. Much of what we recollect from the past is materially constructed and refined by social and political practices to explain the selective past as much as to frame the future. As such, memorial landscapes not only serve social memories, but also the political agenda of the powerful regime. Consequently, “what is commemorated is not synonymous with what has happened in the past. Rather the commemorated past is socially defined as memorable and significant” (Dwyer and Alderman 2008: 167). Therefore, material representation of the past is commonly politicized, selective, and redefined to fit the needs of the present and the future.

More importantly, in the study of landscape and memory, contestation of the roles of memorials in the remembrance and forgetting has become the focal point of discussion. “Memorials narrate history in selective and controlled ways—hiding as much as they reveal” (Dwyer and Alderman 2008: 168). The remembrance process is closely linked to the process of forgetting. Narrations of the past that do not conform to the official narratives are often excluded from public

recognition and discourse (Legg 2007). Scholars have studied the politically-charged process of memory construction in Cambodia after the fall of DK. Sociologist Serge Thion contends that the PRK's propaganda efforts prevented Cambodians living through the DK regime from forming their own narratives (Thion 1993: 183). Indeed, approximately ninety sites of violence, including those that served as security centers and mass graves, have been formally memorialized through both local and state initiatives. These efforts certainly influence narratives of the past—what people should remember and what they should forget—but they do not obliterate the personal memories of survivors or cause people to remember events that did not occur. Among all the memorial sites, Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek emerged as the primary memorial sites shaping the official, dominant narratives of the DK. As indicated earlier, these sites were converted into a genocide museum and memorial, respectively, almost immediately after the Vietnamese liberated Phnom Penh (Chandler 1999). The accounts from these sites have been carefully selected to serve the hegemonic, dominant narratives initiated by the PRK in 1979.

The narratives set forth by the PRK government, through the establishment of the Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek memorial sites, demonstrated the state's willingness to project an exclusive historical explanation for the events that occurred during the DK regime. The notion of a genocidal act, meaning the extermination of the Khmer, was the state narrative of the PRK (Ledgerwood 1997: 93). Historian David Chandler (2009) writes that in order to justify the presence of Vietnam and distance the PRK regime from the crimes committed by the DK regime, the new emerging state established a narrative that labeled DK a "fascist" regime, in alignment with Hitler's Germany. It was also important for the PRK regime to argue that what had happened in Cambodia during the DK regime, and particularly at Tuol Sleng, was a genocide like that of the Holocaust during the World War II. S-21 was quickly labeled the "Asian Auschwitz," although detailed narratives from Auschwitz and S-21 did not support that comparison, revealing, for example, that unlike the Jews, victims who were tortured and interrogated at S-21 were almost entirely ethnic Khmer DK officials

and soldiers who had been accused of conspiracy against the DK state (Chandler 2009: 360). The comparisons to the genocide/Holocaust discourses serve to elicit international and national interest in the genocidal crimes of the Khmer Rouge. Before Tuol Sleng was opened to the public, private tours were organized for foreign visitors from socialist countries so that they could witness the brutality which had taken place inside the compound. The museum was initially and primarily used to expose international visitors to the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Those visitors were expected to return to their home countries and global communities bearing witness to the stories and experiences of the museum (Hughes 2008).

The Tuol Sleng Museum was not only established to link DK with Nazi Germany, but also to educate Cambodians about the recent tragic past. The narratives portrayed through the museum exhibits were intended to strengthen the presence of the PRK government and condemn the Khmer Rouge for committing genocide against their own population. It was therefore critical that a coherent memory of the recent past continue to be promulgated to confirm that the government had liberated the country from the hands of genocidal traitors who deliberately exterminated nearly two million of its population (Ledgerwood 1997). Through this message, the PRK government was also able to legitimize their power, which hinged upon the exposure of the violent excesses of the Khmer Rouge as exemplified by S-21.

In addition, in order to encourage people from other parts of the country to identify with the narrative set forth by the museum, the PRK government noted that the skulls used for making the map of Cambodia were collected from “killing fields” throughout the country (Hughes 2006). This suggests that through the memorial map of skulls at the museum, the state was confirming the notion that the crimes, as evidenced within the museum, provided a narrative for the entire country (Ledgerwood 1997). Also, directives were issued to local village authorities to exhume human remains from the mass graves and erect memorial stupas to commemorate those who died during the Khmer Rouge regime. The memorials were constructed to serve as a focal point for the

commemoration events (May 20<sup>th</sup> Day of Remembrance) and to emphasize the collective suffering of the nation under the “Pol Potists” (Hughes 2006: 33).

Earlier visitors to the museum were generally provided with a single message that represented the public/historical truth about the DK period. Through the museum, the PRK presented an official master narrative that the “glorious victory” of the true revolution liberated the country from imperialist hands, but that true revolution was hijacked by a small number of “murderous criminals” (Ledgerwood 1997: 90-91). In the 1980s, Cambodian visitors to the museum wrote notes expressing views that generally supported the state publications. The most important message developed through those visits centered on anger born of betrayal and frustration. The state propaganda, in its presentation of the Tuol Sleng museum, was that “you must support us because to fail to do so will result in the return to power of the Khmer Rouge” (Ledgerwood 1997: 91). Messages such as this were used to support narratives of Tuol Sleng and the DK period in general. The messages placed a high level of blame on DK and the crimes of the DK genocidal cliques. To enforce this position, the museum presented the public with heinous depictions of the DK regime—brutality and violence portrayed through mugshots of the victims, images of corpses in the prison cells when the site was discovered, display of torture instruments and shackles, and unwashed blood stains covering the floor and walls. Without contextual information, the artifacts on display made the museum even more persuasive (Hughes 2003). When Cambodian citizens were allowed to visit the museum, they not only discovered information about family members who had gone missing during the DK period, they also searched for meaning regarding what had happened to them and their families during the DK period. The historical narratives constructed at the museum provided an explanation for their own experiences which had been seemingly difficult to comprehend.

In recent years, Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek have become significant tourist attractions. The sites operate principally as a tourist destination with few to non-Cambodians comprising the

majority of the tourists (Hughes 2008; Williams 2004). They represent important sites of the dark tourism circuit among international visitors and maintain the larger narratives of the recent violent past (Chandler 2008). As discussed in the previous chapters, while these sites are significant in this sense, many other sites of violence from the Khmer Rouge regime are unremarkable and stand as silent testimony to the atrocities that were perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge (Tyner and others 2012). Though the accounts from those unmarked sites have been decidedly less recognized in the public landscapes, they stand as a constant reminder to all the survivors who live in close proximity to them. Drawing on villagers' narratives and my own observations of Prek Ta Meak Commune, this chapter explores some of these unremarkable sites, as they exist in the memories of local survivors and as material evidence of the violence committed during the DK regime. The following discussion will examine several violent sites to which survivors have referred in their narratives. Although survivors vividly recall the events and personal experiences associated with these sites, the attempt to memorialize these sites has not been realized and they remain invisible and unremarkable in the landscape. This chapter will also provide a narrative of memorialization at the local level and evaluate the way in which the local population has become less focused on the memorial.

#### *Former Khmer Rouge prison: Chamkar Siv*

To the north of Prek Ta Meak Village, accessible by a dirt road running along the Mekong River connecting the main local market of Prek Ta Meak to Kampong Damrei Village, sits a piece of unfenced land filled with a huge pile of sand. The land is located next to the riverbank, with houses of local residents to the east and west and a dirt road to the south. Unlike the surrounding area, this particular site is not covered with any vegetation or fruit trees. A local businessman uses the land to store and sell sand that is dredged from the river. During the Khmer Rouge regime, this site was transformed into an infamous detention center known as Chamkar Siv for the district of Ksach Kandal. The Khmer Rouge converted two houses which had been built before the regime into a

detention center where victims were detained, interrogated, and executed. The houses had belonged to a local family who, during the Khmer Rouge regime, were relocated to the northwestern province of Battambang. Since the homeowners did not survive to relate their experiences and none of the villagers I met had been relocated to the same region as the family, the circumstances of their relocation and their living conditions remain unknown. After the fall of the DK regime, no ownership of the houses was claimed, so the local villagers and authorities dismantled the houses and used the salvaged materials for construction of public offices, including the current commune office. During DK, as the designated district-level security center, Chamkar Siv detained 'ordinary' prisoners from the district of Ksach Kandal. Survivors who were detained at the security center recall living and working there and describe the site as a place of terror and trauma. Nowadays, when an outside visitor passes by the site, he or she has no awareness that just a few meters away from the dirt road was a site of terror in which people were detained and executed. This place contrasts with Tuol Sleng, which was designated a 'typical' security center and has received recognition as a major narrative of the past violence. As a major Cambodian tourist destination for international visitors, Tuol Sleng has the privilege of maintaining the larger narrative of the recent past, while Chamkar Siv security center can only be discerned through the narratives of the survivors who experienced it. Narratives of survivors detail the operation of the security center and the living and working conditions inside the center.



**Figure 3: The land in which the Chamkar Siv prison was situated. The detention house was dismantled after 1979 (Source: Author)**

Aside from detaining prisoners, the daily operations of Chamkar Siv Prison included interrogation and torture. Torture was used to extract confessions from prisoners, who were then forced to sign confession statements. As a security center, Chamkar Siv not only detained prisoners, but also documented and punished criminal offenses. Although the prison was administratively organized into different units, including guarding, interrogation, arrest, and kitchen, staff members were not assigned to a specific unit, but usually assumed several roles. Those who guarded prisoners might also be assigned as an interrogator. The prison chief himself served as a registrant, interrogator and torturer.

Documentation of the prisoners at Chamkar Siv was similar to that at S-21 Prison. Extracting and organizing information about the prisoners, including their personal and employment histories, was an important means by which the Khmer Rouge controlled the prisoners. These records of prisoners, known as “biographies,” were essential for the administration of the prison facility. David Chandler (1999: 14-15) defines the operation at the S-21 prison facility as “an extreme example of a total institution,” in which “control over biographies, inmates, and the personnel working at S-21 was absolute and followed a complex ‘discipline’



(*viney*) (emphasis in original) that enabled the keepers to dominate the kept and to preside over their refashioning.” As was the practice at S-21, prisoners at Chamkar Siv Prison were registered as they arrived in the prison compound. A prison staff member usually awaited the prisoners in order to record their names upon arrival, and a short biography was written down based on the responses of the prisoners. Unlike S-21, photographs were never taken. It is unclear at this point why mug-shots were not taken of the prisoners; one possible explanation is that the prisoners detained at Chamkar Siv were considered ‘less important’ than those at Tuol Sleng; conversely, it may simply be the case that staff at Chamkar Siv had no access to photographic equipment. Soeun<sup>3</sup> confirms the absence of photography:

There were no photographs taken while collecting the biographies, but they told me to provide a thumbprint after the biography was written. I didn’t have the right to read the biography before thumbprinting it, so I didn’t know what they had written about me. (Author’s interview, June 6, 2014)

Following registration, prisoners were summoned for interrogation after several days of detention. In most cases, prisoners were tortured during the questioning process. Torture was a very effective means of extracting confessions from prisoners. Throughout the process, interrogators carefully crafted the confession statements to implicate the prisoners in traitorous activities. On average, according to the respondents, prisoners were forced to give a confession at least twice during their detainment period, and they were forced to sign the confession statements as proof of their acknowledgment of the documents. However, not all prisoners were forced to provide a confession. Among a group of 28 people who were arrested together in 1977, for example, only a handful were interrogated and tortured:

I wasn’t one of those who was taken for interrogation. Only about 10 people out of the total of 28 were interrogated. I think I was lucky not to have been selected. If they had taken me for interrogation, I would have been beaten to death, because every interrogation involved torture. If you didn’t answer, you got beaten. If you messed up your answers, you got beaten. Regardless of the situation, you would get beaten. (Author’s interview with Soeun, June 6, 2014)

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<sup>3</sup> To preserve the identity of all interviewees, I have used pseudonyms instead of real names.

Interrogation and torture was used to keep the prisoners under control and to extract confessions detailing their traitorous activities. The interrogation and torture of prisoners was part of the daily routine at the higher-level prison S-21. Similar to the interrogation technique utilized at S-21, interrogation of Chamkar Siv prisoners was initiated with a “gentle” method, in which prisoners were questioned without force to extract a confession of their traitorous activities. (See Chandler 1999 for details). However, if the first attempt was not successful in extracting a satisfactory answer, an interrogator from the “hot” group would intervene with physical forms of torture. Keo described how he was interrogated and tortured:

I stayed inside the prison for five days before they took me out for interrogation. There were about five or six of us who were interrogated. At 8:00 in the morning, a security guard named Ya took me from the detention house to the interrogation place... They asked me what I did wrong and why Angkar had arrested and imprisoned me. I said I didn't know what I had done wrong. And I kept repeating that. The interrogator stopped asking and sent me back to the detention house. A few days later, they took me to the interrogation site again. This time a hot interrogator questioned me. The interrogator said that if I didn't confess, he would lock me in the dark prison until I died. I confessed that I had stolen a couple of ears of corn to eat while I was harvesting them in the fields. He said, “If you only stole a few ears of corn, Angkar would not have bothered to arrest you.” He then started hitting me in the head and face with a bamboo cane. They tied my arms to a mango tree during the interrogation. They pushed the chair on which I standing so that I lost balance, fell from the chair and hung from the tree. I lost consciousness. When I woke up, I couldn't feel my arms... My arms were swollen and turned black. (Author's interview, June 6, 2014)

A former prisoner claimed that the confession and registration documents were left behind by the prison staff upon the overthrow of the regime. However, the locals burned those documents when the detention houses were dismantled after 1979. Soeun explains:

Everything was recorded in their notebooks. In fact, there were written records of the interrogations, but people collected and burned the documents right after we were liberated [in 1979]. I think there was a large amount of documents. If we had paid attention to preserving those documents, we would be able to provide an abundance of documentary evidence. The Khmer Rouge produced a significant number of records, and combined and clipped the papers into books. (Author's interview, June 6, 2014)

The conditions in the prison were nearly unbearable for the sick and elderly. In addition to executions, prisoners died from starvation, lack of hygiene, lack of medical care, and hard labor. Due to a lack of proper documentation, the number of prisoners who passed through the prison is

not known. According to DC-Cam's mapping report (2008), between 7,000 and 10,000 bodies were discovered in an adjacent mass grave that has since been converted into residential use. Soeun, a survivor, estimates the number of prisoners who were murdered or died from starvation-related conditions and disease to be around 2,000 during the period during which he was imprisoned (c. 1977 to 1978). He explains:

At least one or two people died in their prison cell. Additionally, once a month they took approximately 70 to 80 people away to be executed. They told us that those people were being released, but in fact they were executed. And they took in 5 to 10 people from various places in the district.

Today the site bears little or no evidence of the violence that was perpetrated there. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, what remained of the security center were the associated mass graves that contained the bodies and remains of the victims. Bodies were buried at the gravesites as well as scattered along the riverbank on which the detention center was located. Today the mass grave sites, which were located not far from the houses of detention, are covered with new residential settlements and cultivated crops.

#### *Mass graves*

The Khmer Rouge used the area in the vicinity of the prison to bury the bodies of their victims. However, after the passage of many years, these burial pits have left no traces of evidence of what happened there. Today that land is used for agricultural cultivation. In some cases, mass graves have been integrated into the 'productive space' of the village and the land is used for agriculture (Hughes 2006).



**Figure 4: The mass graves in which the Khmer Rouge buried victims. Today, the field is covered with bean crops and grass (Source: Author)**

Located approximately four kilometers southwest of the former Chamkar Siv Prison are other, unmarked mass graves in which the Khmer Rouge buried bodies of thousands of men, women, and children who were executed in the early period of the DK regime. At one site, following the collapse of the Khmer Rouge, local authorities and villagers worked to exhume and identify the remains of victims. Skeletal remains were collected and memorialized at a wooden stupa built at a nearby Buddhist temple, Wat Prek Ta Meak. Over the years, however, neglect and lack of funds led to the deterioration of the stupa. The remains were transferred to a different stupa although, again, this memorial site has fallen into disrepair. Consequently, none of the physical evidence—the mass graves, the skeletal remains, or the memorials—remain on the landscape. Similar to Chamkar Siv, the mass graves have been converted to rice fields, former prisons dismantled, and human remains lost or neglected. At these sites, and hundreds of others throughout Cambodia, there are no markers, no signs, and no physical traces of past violence. These unmarked and unremarked sites persist as living evidence of the violence perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge, and yet they are concealed behind the everyday living and working landscape of the local villagers. They are only

revealed by, and known to, the survivors who lived in close proximity to, or literally on, the sites. And yet, in their silence, they provide counter-narratives to the politically-constructed memories observed at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek.

The villagers who lived near the mass graves can still remember the events associated with what happened there. According to a villager, most of the bodies that were buried in the mass graves belonged to those who were considered enemies of the regime. They included former Lon Nol soldiers, former government officials, and both new and base people. Most former soldiers and new people were evacuees from Phnom Penh who came to Prek Ta Meak Commune after the Khmer Rouge took control of the capital city. Their identities were quickly revealed to the Khmer Rouge authorities, since most of them were originally from the villages and their jobs or positions were known to the local “base” people during the pre-revolutionary period. This factor allowed the Khmer Rouge to discover the true identity of these people in a very short time and led to the execution of former government officials and soldiers. Some former soldiers were captured during the fighting, while others were identified later when they relocated to the village. The wife of a former Lon Nol soldier described how her husband was taken away from her after the Khmer Rouge found out his true identity. Kunthea and her husband were classified as new people because she did not live in the village, which had been part of the revolutionary zone, during the Lon Nol regime. Not long after she and her husband were evacuated from the city by the Khmer Rouge and resettled in the village with Kunthea’s family, the Khmer Rouge learned that her husband had been a Lon Nol soldier. The identity of Kunthea’s husband was revealed through the process of recording biographies. When the Khmer Rouge initially took full control of the villages, all evacuees or new people who had just arrived from Phnom Penh were required to provide brief biographies. Kunthea and her husband were no exception. She describes:

The first few days after we arrived in the village, the village chief began to record our names and backgrounds. They compiled our biographies. We didn’t try to hide our background because we knew that they knew us and what we did. So hiding was not practical. While we were away at work, they would inspect our house to see if we had

any valuables or property that should be collected for the cooperative. The Khmer Rouge was aware of everything that we had in our house. They scrutinized everyone's personal belongings. So they knew who I was and what I did in the previous regime. (Author's interview, July 7, 2014)

Not long after the biographies were recorded, the Khmer Rouge came to Kunthea's house and escorted her husband away. The Khmer Rouge told her that they were taking him to a reeducation center. In tears, she recalls what happened on the day her husband was arrested:

... My husband went to work as usual. I remember what he said to me about 'leaving' [the village, but] I couldn't figure out [why he wanted to do so].... In the afternoon, the black-clad Khmer Rouge militia came to my house while I was sitting inside. I saw them pointing at my house. I wondered if there was anything suspicious about our family. They walked past our house, and then turned to glance back at the house. I was worried. At 7:00 that night, they returned and took my husband away. My mother and my brother, who was a village chief, were also living with us and told my husband not to leave. They told him to get dressed and take a new *krama* (traditional Cambodian scarf). Armed with rifles, the Khmer Rouge militia came upstairs to look for my husband [and took him away with them]. After he was taken away, I still did not know that they were going to execute him. I thought that he was being sent to a reeducation center [as the soldiers had told me]. Not until 1977 did I realize that my husband had been taken away to be executed. I learned the news when the villagers (base people) told me, "You will never see your husband again. Your husband is dead." I remember that he was killed on May 20th, the Day of Hatred that we commemorate every year. I remember it clearly because I wrote down the day when he was taken away. (Author's interview, July 7, 2014)

Kunthea became terrified after realizing that her husband had been taken away to be executed, not simply to be reeducated. She began to work extra hard in the hopes that the Khmer Rouge authorities would spare her life. Although she was not tortured or killed, she was treated more harshly than the base people by the Khmer Rouge authorities. She was once falsely accused of committing moral misconduct. The Khmer Rouge repeatedly warned her not to commit any wrongdoing. She struggled to endure this harsh mistreatment until the end of the Khmer Rouge regime in early 1979. Although she was told that her husband had been executed and buried in the mass grave located behind the Prek Ta Meak Pagoda, she was only able to confirm that information when the local authorities began exhuming bodies of the victims from the grave during early 1980s.

Kunthea still lives in the same house in the same village, in close proximity to the mass graves which were dug by the Khmer Rouge to dispose of bodies and which were later excavated to exhume the skeletal remains. Although the site now shows no trace of evidence of the executions of humans committed by the Khmer Rouge, Kunthea describes how she still bears witness to the atrocity that took place there. The memory of her husband is permanently ingrained in the landscape, yet there is no mark of the violence that took his life and many others. What does appear on the site are vegetable gardens and fields of cassavas and green beans. Nothing remarkable remains on the landscape to indicate what happened, or to specifically commemorate the execution of her husband. Only her memory lives on to reveal the story of what happened there. In the commune, this site is not the only unremarkable place which is etched in the memory of villagers; survivors remember many other such sites in the area.

#### *Former Khmer Rouge offices and hospital*

Within the commune of Prek Ta Meak, there were many sites and physical structures associated with the local administration of DK. About three kilometers to the west of the present commune office was the former DK commune office, which had been converted from a local villager's house. Built in a blended traditional Khmer-Chinese style, the house that was turned into the commune office originally belonged to a family who had been evacuated to Battambang Province by the Khmer Rouge in 1976. The house had been resided in by the family since it was built in 1957 until the victory of the Khmer Rouge in April 1975. Hour, the only survivor from the family, describes what she discovered at her home after returning to the village: "When I returned to my home village, I found my house almost empty. ... Before I left for Phnom Penh during the war, I had grown many kinds of trees; I had two sewing machines and many other household supplies. ... afterward all the possessions in the house were gone." (Author's interview, July 2014)



**Figure 5: The house converted into the Khmer Rouge's commune office (Source: Author)**

The Khmer Rouge used the house as a residence and working office for commune level officials. According to a villager who lived in close proximity to the house during the DK regime, the commune chief, his family, and several staff members lived in the house during that time. The house was utilized for commune meetings in which local economic and agricultural activities were discussed. A former Khmer Rouge cadre, who lived in the house, described the conditions in the house during the time he lived there: "There was a wooden bed in which I slept. There was no kitchen or bathroom in the house as there is now. The kitchen was arranged in a hall in front of the house. The commune chief slept on the floor on the house. The hall in front of the house was built to store supplies and was looked after by an old woman. This house was not destroyed or damaged by bombing or gunfire; it was very well-preserved. That was one of the reasons why the Khmer Rouge chose this house to be the base for the commune office." (Author's interview with San, July 3, 2014)



This narrative reveals that the decision made by the Khmer Rouge in their selection of the existing structure based on its condition and location was not irrational. The relatively well-preserved condition of the house made it a preferable choice as a site for the Khmer Rouge to base communal administrative and security functions. According to the villager, the house was not only used as a meeting hall or residence, but also housed Khmer Rouge prisoners before they were transferred to the main security center at Chamkar Siv. The multifunctional use of the converted house was not uncommon during the DK regime. Many pre-existing buildings of the previous regime, including Buddhist temples, schools, and hospitals, were converted from their original functions into new uses that served the practical needs of the regime. For example, a building in the commune's pagoda, which was partially destroyed by bombs in the early 1970s, was converted into a hall to house sewing machines and similar activities. Today, that building no longer exists, having been replaced by a new dining hall which is still under construction. Evidence which might reveal the stories behind the use of buildings and their functions during the DK was obliterated because the buildings were incorporated into the productive space of the village and then converted back into their original purpose as houses.

Another location of significance to local villagers during the Khmer Rouge period is the former district level hospital, located approximately three kilometers east of the former Khmer Rouge commune office and approximately one kilometer from the present commune hall. The hospital was located in the current commune's secondary school, known as Preah Sihanouk Reach Secondary High School, which was established during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum regime (1960s). The school was converted into a district hospital in 1977, when the Khmer Rouge relocated the hospital from a nearby commune to Prek Ta Meak Commune. A former staff member at the hospital recalls:

I began working in the health department in 1977. This former secondary high school was covered with bushes and trees. I helped to clear the ground in preparation for the new hospital. The district level hospital was originally located at Preah Prasab (district). We

came here to clear the area and clean up the former school so they could relocate the hospital from Preah Prasab to this location. (Author's interview with Kong, July 22, 2014)

The whole operation of the hospital was transferred to the new location, including staff, medical equipment, and hospital supplies. New staff members from the local village were recruited to attend medical training as nurses and nursing assistants at the hospital compound. The nurses and assistants were assigned to carry out all the medical-related tasks, including injection of medicines, assisting in surgery, and carrying corpses to a burial site behind the hospital. The villager recalls:

I once went to the hospital to help set up a generator for an operation. There was a pregnant woman from Vihear Suor,<sup>4</sup> whose child had died in utero. She had to have an operation. The village chief asked me if I could install a generator at the hospital so they could perform the operation. I was present and witnessed the whole operation. They asked the family members and husband of the woman if they agreed to having the operation performed and if they were ready to face any possible consequence. After asking the family, they began the operation. (Author's interview with Deth, July 10, 2014)

The above narratives detail functions and working conditions in the medical facility. Through this narrative, we learn that the hospital was operated through a vertical line administration, with both bottom-up and top-down orders, similar to other Khmer Rouge administrative management. Patients in the cooperative were sent to the village medical center for treatment. If the village medical center was unable to treat the patient, they were sent to the commune, the district, and finally to the regional level. The same is true for the medical staff who received job training. Doctors and nurses from the zonal and regional levels would come to the district to provide training to the staff members. After the training was completed, only a doctor and staff of nurses remained at the district hospital.

Furthermore, these narratives provide a level of understanding into the social welfare and health care policies during DK. The Khmer Rouge leaders at the zonal level provided the necessary means for hospitals to be established at all levels. As a former Khmer Rouge medical staff member

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<sup>4</sup> Name of a village located east of Prek Ta Meak.

relates, she was assigned to a job which tried to limit malaria in the village. Her daily task was to spray insecticide at various places to control mosquitos and prevent malaria from spreading. Besides performing this task, she was also required to care for patients at the commune hospital. The health care policy appears to have been generous to the local population; this was probably due to the flexible management style of the leadership of the Eastern Zone (see Vickery 1984, Kiernan 2002 for narratives from the Eastern Zone).

However, the extent to which such a policy was effective in addressing health care for the population remains unclear. According to former staff and villagers who lived in close proximity to the hospital, throughout the hospital's operation, increasing numbers of patients who were sent to the hospital died and were buried in graves surrounding the main hospital buildings. Today, one cannot identify the exact location of these gravesites, as the site has become overgrown with vegetation and farmland. The hospital buildings have reverted back to their original purpose as a school. Although the site has now become an education center, it remains as a silent testament to the structural violence perpetrated against the local villagers during the DK period. Such a legacy of violence at the former hospital can only be revealed through the narratives of the former Khmer Rouge members and those who survived the regime.

Much of our recollection of the past consists of collective memories that are constructed and transmitted to us through a variety of cultural practices. The landscape of memory has the power to shape and influence how people remember and interpret the past, in part, because of the common impression that memories are impartial recorders of history (Dwyer and Alderman 2008: 168). The violence and atrocities that were committed against the people were internalized within individual memory, but they can be revealed through narratives. This site, along with the commune office, Chamkar Siv Prison and associated mass graves mentioned above, are sites of violence revealed through narratives of violence, trauma, and death. However the extent to which they potentially

become memorialized is not entirely clear.<sup>5</sup> They differ from Tuol Sleng, which is an officially-sanctioned site that solidifies particular narratives about political legitimacy and is geared, not toward locals, but rather to international travelers who are able to develop a limited understanding of the genocide (McCargo 2011; Sion 2011). Sites of violence in Prek Ta Meak have quickly become forgotten to all but the older survivors who witnessed firsthand the brutality that occurred there. The children living in the area know little if anything about the site, and international visitors would never visit these sites.

Physical remains are scarce and collective memories of the past are politically constructed and influenced. The way we memorialize sites of violence owes a great deal to the practice of contested memory, and a number of factors influence whether the memorialization occurs. Sponsorship of memorials is one significant aspect. Politics of memory is also an important factor in determining the way in which the sites are to be remembered. Legg (2007) notes such a contested memory and memorialization by stating, “Memorials narrate history in selective and controlled ways—hiding as much as they reveal” (Legg 2007; as cited in Dwyer and Alderman 2008, p. 168). As such, memorials are not only the representation of history but also cast legitimacy upon the present; the act of memorialization becomes part of the present regime’s political and ideological agenda. Only survivors’ narratives live on to contribute a certain level of understanding as to how such atrocities were perpetrated.

### **Local Memorialization of Violence and Neglect of Memorials**

Wat Prek Ta Meak is a Buddhist temple in Prek Ta Meak Commune, located about one kilometer from the former security center Chamkar Siv and a few hundred meters away from the mass graves. As discussed in the previous chapter, prior to April 17, 1975, the whole commune was

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<sup>5</sup> For further discussion of potential and realized sites of violence and memorialized sites, see Tyner, J., Sirik, S., & Henkin, S. (2014). Violence and the Dialectics of Landscape: Memorialization in Cambodia. *Geographical Review*, 104(3), 277-293.

under constant attack from opposing military forces and from aerial U.S. bombings. During the 1970s, the area became the frontline for confrontations between the Khmer Rouge revolutionary army and the forces of the Lon Nol regime. As a consequence of repeated aerial bombardment and exchanges of fire between military forces, almost all the temple buildings and structures were destroyed. The bombs also left large depressions in the landscape inside and surrounding the temple areas. As testified by a villager, the pagoda was largely destroyed by the bombs, but there is little evidence of the bombing legacy. “This pagoda was destroyed by the bombing... In front of the main [temple’s] gate was the spot where a B-52 exploded [a bomb]. It left a large hole there, which we can no longer see,” a villager said. The bombs burned down all other buildings within the temple compound, including the monk’s quarters and a study hall. The only structures that remained were the main prayer hall, dining hall, and several stupas. Although gunshots left bullet holes in the walls, the building structures remained intact throughout the war period.

Although the pagoda was severely damaged by the civil war, the Khmer Rouge found the place useful and immediately transformed it into a site for daily activities to support major agricultural production. The buildings that remained inside the temple were transformed into a warehouse and a cattle shelter. “The Khmer Rouge removed the entire roofs of the main prayer hall and the dining hall and converted the space into a place to herd cattle and sew clothing,” a villager recalls. The clothes they sewed at the former Buddhist center were distributed to all the villagers in the district. Following the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, the old prayer hall was replaced with a new building and a new dining hall was under construction at the time I conducted my research.

Nothing remains of the former Chamkar Siv Prison and the mass graves associated with it are unmarked and overgrown by fruit-bearing trees. However, a memorial stupa has been erected at the wat [pagoda]. As part of the PRK’s policies to reconstruct national memory, local authorities were encouraged to recover human remains and place them in boneyard memorials that were built in each commune. Local villagers were asked to identify mass graves and places of execution, under

the direction of the Genocide Research Committee into Khmer Rouge crimes, and undertaken by government staff at the district level (Hughes 2006).

Despite having been converted into a worksite by the Khmer Rouge, Wat Prek Ta Meak was restored to its original function as a Buddhist center and selected by the local authorities as the site for the local boneyard memorial. Remains of hundreds of thousands of victims who were executed or died of starvation or disease were exhumed from several mass graves in the commune in order to be preserved in this memorial. As Anne Yvonne Guillou points out, memorials reflected a degree of sophistication based on the availability of the local funds (2012: 213). The memorials were constructed of wood or bamboo and covered with bricks, palm leaves or tiles. At Prek Ta Meak, a wooden memorial was built in 1980 or 1981. They excavated and compiled the bones and skulls before building the memorial to store the remains. Immediately after the stupa was built, a religious ceremony was conducted to commemorate the victims who died under the DK regime.

Commemorative celebrations take place every year at the pagoda in front of the memorial on 'Remembrance Day' (May 20<sup>th</sup>) and 'Victory Day' (January 7<sup>th</sup>). Although Guillou argues that these celebrations have been organized solely to serve political and propaganda purposes (2012, 2013), the local villagers continue to participate in the events to commemorate their loved ones who died during the DK period. They use the time to recall the death, remember the deceased and how they died. Kunthea, the wife of a former Lon Nol soldier who was killed and buried in the mass grave, recalls, "I attended every May 20<sup>th</sup> celebration and came home crying because it reminded me of my husband [who had been executed] and what I endured during the DK regime" (Author's interview, July 7, 2014). Later, other major religious ceremonies, such as *Pchum Ben* (festival for deceased ancestors), Khmer New Year, and *Bon Phkar Samaki* (Solidarity Flower Ceremony) began to take place in the compound of the temple. These religious ceremonies were conducted in part to bestow merit upon those who died under the DK regime, but also to celebrate the Buddhist tradition.

Anthropologist Judy Ledgerwood argues that the *Pchum Ben* festival has become an important way

for individuals and families to commemorate family members who died during the DK regime. Through this traditional festival, people make offerings to their deceased loved ones, including those who continue to wander in the living world and have not passed on to the next rebirth (2012). She adds that the festival is even more important for Cambodians today than it was before the war period, because there are more people who suffered a 'bad death,' literally meaning those who died a 'violent death,'<sup>6</sup> particularly those who died from execution, starvation, or overwork during the DK regime (Ledgerwood 2012). The current religious rituals not only commemorate the victims of the Khmer Rouge, but also help to rebuild social connections among the survivors following the devastating violence of the DK regime.

While displaying human remains at the memorial stupa was a significant act of the state in an effort to construct national memory, many individuals were disappointed at not being able to personally conduct the exhumation and organize the bones and skulls. Villagers in Prek Ta Meak acknowledged the efforts to recover bones and skulls, the construction of a memorial, and the commemorations that were initiated by the government. However, unlike other places in which villagers played a central role in picking up and compiling the bones and skulls to be stored in local memorials,<sup>7</sup> in Prek Ta Meak, many survivors stated that ordinary villagers were not allowed to approach the site while the excavation took place. Some people were not even aware of the project. During the excavation, only four people from the committee in charge of the task were allowed to dig the graves. Kunthea states, "When they started to exhume the bones of victims from the mass graves, I hid in a bush to watch the whole process. I wanted to know if my husband's body was buried there. The first, the second and the third grave... When the third grave was being exhumed, I noticed a familiar cloth which I assumed was my husband's. The process took place over many days.

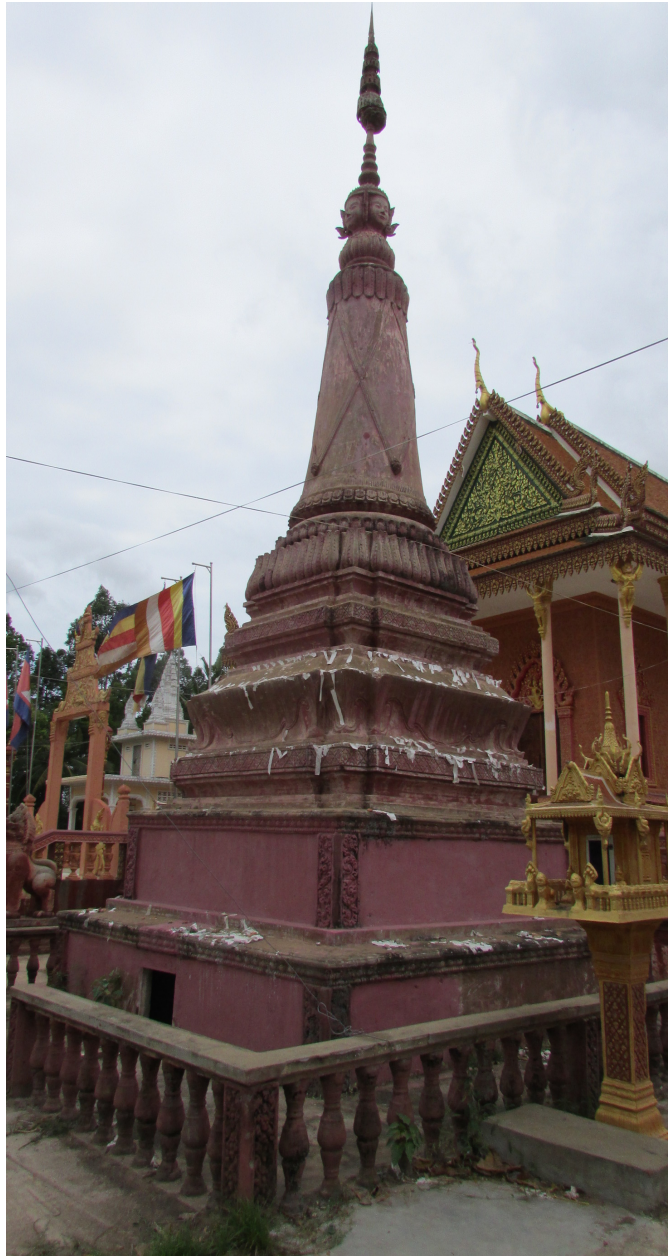
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<sup>6</sup> As in other Southeast Asian societies, people who commit suicide, are murdered, have fatal accidents, or die during childbirth are perceived as 'bad dead', which is in contrast to 'normal death,' which is brought about by old age and ordinary disease (Cited in Guillou, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> As indicated in Guillou's (2012; 2013) research, local villagers were generally active participants in the process of exhumation and bone collection.

They did not allow us to enter the area where they were working. I watched it from a distance.” A village leader said that he did not participate in the exhumation and that only the authorities from the district office conducted the excavation. He added, “I learned that they collected the bones and skulls to be kept at a memorial, but I am not sure where the memorial is... I don’t know how many graves were dug. Back then, there was a major flood in this area, so it was difficult to identify and exhume all the bodies. The flood filled the area with a layer of mud, which covered the graves and physical evidence. I don’t think they have discovered all the bodies.” (Author’s interview, July 2014) Other villagers who were aware of the exhumation did not pay attention to where the remains were moved, exactly where the memorial was built, or if it still stands there.





**Figure 6: The old stupa stores victim remains removed from the old memorial (Source: Author)**

While the mass graves and the former security center have gone unremarked throughout the post-Khmer Rouge period, the memorial has gradually also become less visible. Guillou asserts that in the 1990s, state memorials at the local level “were gradually neglected by the officials and

abandoned in most communes” (2012: 241). The willingness to preserve the memorials weakened and the interest in repairing and maintaining them gradually declined. The wooden stupa did not stand for many years. Both the memorial and the bones deteriorated over time, forcing the local villagers to remove the remaining bones to an old existing stupa which had been built long before the Khmer Rouge regime. There are several explanations regarding the decreased attention to the memorial and the remains. One relates to a shortage of funding at the local level during the memorial construction. A villager said that because funding was decidedly limited, the stupa had to be built from inexpensive materials like wood or palm leaves. This made the stupa fragile and susceptible to the ravages of weather and time. Ultimately, it resulted in the removal of the remains from the original memorial to an old existing stupa. As the villager related, “The memorial was built to store the remains, but it was not built from concrete because we were poor at the time. We didn’t have enough money to erect a concrete building. I don’t know if it is still there today. I don’t know where they placed the bones after they cleaned up the pagoda.”

In addition, it is clear that political and economic factors have impacted the preservation of local memorials and commemoration sites. In the early 1990s, as Cambodia transitioned from a socialist to a democratic state, the necessary political and economic reform greatly affected the ways in which the state treated local memorials and associated commemorations. Although Rachel Hughes (2006) rightly points out that memorials have taken on different roles, including that of collective public mourning, and cannot be viewed purely as political instruments for the justification of power, these factors continue to play a central role in shaping the landscape of memory in Cambodia. After the Khmer Rouge regime ended, people focused on making a living and improving their economic and living conditions rather than preserving the memorials. Despite more than two decades of political and economic reform, the drive to improve individual economic circumstances continues to present a persistent challenge to the act of memorialization. This explanation is especially accurate in the case of Prek Ta Meak, “... after more than 30 years, people

in this commune are paying less attention to such commemoration events. I think they are more focused on earning a living than in participating in the commemoration. Economic factors have played an important role in influencing the memories of Cambodian people”(Author’s interview with Hong on June 9, 2014). Hong also indicates that fewer people attend commemoration events because they must take care of their business and farming. The economic and political aspects play significant roles in the local attitude towards the memorialization in Cambodia.

Social and family-related factors have partly accounted for the neglect of the memorial stupa and human remains. Guillou argues that peasants commonly view memorials as state-sponsored initiatives and consequently they do not feel particularly connected to them (2012: 215, 2013: 267). Findings in this research suggest that a relationship between a victim who was executed and the related living survivors plays a significant role in the continued life of memorials and the acts of memorialization. The majority of victims who were buried in the mass graves were former Lon Nol soldiers or new people whose surviving family members no longer reside in the village. Therefore, the incentive to preserve the remains and conduct collective commemorations has gradually diminished. Hong, the former commune chief of Prek Ta Meak, points out the importance of the relationship between the dead and the living. He indicates, “We know that the victims were mostly former Lon Nol soldiers who were defeated and arrested by the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge executed the soldiers and buried them in the graves. After 1979, the remains were recovered and preserved at the commune office and the memorial in the pagoda. Nobody pays attention to the bones anymore, although we do hold a ceremony for the victims every year.”

In this quote, we see how the status of the dead and their indirect ties to the villagers limit the interest and willingness of the villagers in preserving the human remains. In relation to this particular issue, another villager states that the meaning of family attachment is important for Cambodians as they remember and memorialize sites associated with the Khmer Rouge regime. She said, “Even if we know that these places were burial sites of prisoners or victims, until now we have

not conducted any ritual ceremonies [at the sites] collectively dedicated to the dead. Only relatives or family members of the dead who knew that their relatives died there have come back and performed rituals to bestow merit upon them” (Author’s interview with Thida, July 22, 2014). Guillou’s study also indicates that while state and local authorities neglected the memorials, local villagers continued to look after the memorials and that family funeral rituals were increasingly performed by families whose relatives had died during the Khmer Rouge regime (Guillou 2012; 2013). The significance of family relations, coupled with economic challenges and political factors, affects the extent to which living survivors remain to memorialize the past.

A common concept that helps to explain the decreased interest of individuals in preserving collective remains and memorials is religious belief. In addition to the commemorative ceremony of the May 20<sup>th</sup> Day of Remembrance or the January 7<sup>th</sup> Liberation Day, which have gradually and primarily been marked as celebrations of the ruling party (Cambodian People’s Party), individual families still continue to perform annual rituals to dedicate and bless their relatives who died under the Khmer Rouge regime. This is accomplished through individual rituals or as part of the national Buddhist ceremony of *Pchum Ben*, after these traditional religious ceremonies was reintroduced throughout the country following the PRK regime. Soon after the fall of the regime, many Cambodian families began searching for remains of their loved ones or the place where they died so that the family could perform a funeral ritual or religious ceremony dedicating merit to the deceased. Such beliefs are prevalent in Southeast Asian religious practices. In Vietnam, it is believed that the dead who have not received the benefit of such ritual practices continue to inhabit the space between the world of the living and the world of the dead (Kwon 2006: 12). Besides assisting the dead in being liberated from the violent tragic space, religion, rituals and associated beliefs allow survivors to rebuild a connection with the lost family members and cope with the trauma they experienced during the DK period. In the 1980s, Buddhism was rarely tolerated during the PRK and only a few monks were ordained, so the funeral rituals were simplified to the offering a

piece of clothing to the monks as symbol of providing merit for the dead (Guillou 2012: 217). In such rituals, the bodies of the deceased are not necessarily present to make the rituals complete. Survivors want to ensure that their immediate family members or relatives, who suffered violent deaths during the DK regime and might become lost spirits mingling with the living, will have their suffering eased and be passed on to rebirth. Thus, religious rituals are performed at both the family and community level to serve this purpose (Ledgerwood 2012). Although people who died under the Khmer Rouge regime are considered to be 'bad dead,' they differ in status from those in Vietnam, where people who have died without appropriate burial or funeral cannot benefit from the performance until the bodies or remains return to the family (Kwon 2006). While collective commemoration at the physical memorial became less important for the villagers at Prek Ta Meak, the surviving families and individuals still perform individual family rituals or participate in a larger Buddhist *Pchum Ben* festival to memorialize those who died under the DK regime.

Another possible explanation for the neglect of the memorials relates to religious tradition, which states that Buddhist memorials are usually left to decay because impermanence is central to Buddhist teaching. In her recent work on curatorial practices in the aftermath of the devastating violence in Cambodia, Ashley Thompson (2013) describes the neglect of memorials as a staged or apparent abandonment of memorials and relics. She states, "Given ways in which relics are frequently 'cared for' in the Khmer pagoda, such a staged abandonment may be entirely in order. Once enshrined, relics can themselves be 'abandoned'—often in a theatrical manner" (Thompson 2013: 89). In her study of the Roka Kaong Pagoda, relics of the dead encased in urns are hidden behind the Buddhist statue in the main prayer hall of the pagoda. In such a context, she argues, "the relics are not simply displayed: when encased in a stupa or a Buddha image, they are hidden from sight, even while the stupa or statue spectacularly advertises their invisibility (Thompson 2013: 89). Victims' remains that were removed from the wooden memorial and placed at the old stupa have gradually become invisible from public view. According to Thompson, this practice is

explained by the Buddhist tradition in which appropriate care of the remains consists of a staged abandonment. Whether the remains are left unattended by the locals based on this reason or other relevant factors, the fact that the memorial was removed from the landscape and that the remains have apparently been long-neglected has not diminished the social aspects of the memorial landscapes carried out through other forms of memorialization. Instead, the invisibility of the remains allows the locals the space and ability to fulfill their memorialization in a personal manner.

Human remains that have been collected and kept at the stupa memorials represent only a small portion of those who died under the Khmer Rouge regime. In Prek Ta Meak, even 35 years after the fall of the regime, very few surviving families have located the site where a family member died. This effort is usually conducted in cooperation with the local former Khmer Rouge members who are able to identify the places where bodies were buried. A former Khmer Rouge medical staff person that was tasked with carrying corpses to the burial sites explains that after 1979, he was helping his uncle identify the spot where he personally buried his son so that he could assist him in exhuming the body. He admits that the [hospital] staff, including himself, was fearful of being criticized by Khmer Rouge authorities, and thus did not properly handle the patients' bodies as they carried and buried corpses of patients. There were no funeral rituals for the dead. He said, "I was able to identify the spot where I buried the body because it was not too long after the fall of the [Khmer Rouge] regime. My uncle approached me to discuss the possible location of the grave. After a discussion, we agreed to dig up a particular spot and successfully recovered the body. We were sure that it was his son's body because I recognized the plastic bag that was used to cover his body." He added that the Khmer Rouge also wrote the names of the dead patients and placed them in a glass bottle which was buried with the body. When people died at the hospital, the Khmer Rouge members who were in charge of the burial wrote a note with the name of the patient and the place they were from so that family members of the dead could later identify the bodies. However, very rarely do family members of the victims come to look for bodies of their relatives. The former

medical staff asserts that only those who were wealthy or were involved in the Khmer Rouge return to look for the bodies because they were closely related to the families. Based on my personal knowledge of Khmer Rouge social practices, the habit of inserting a name in a container to identify a corpse is contrary to the usual way in which the Khmer Rouge treated bodies of victims. This practice is not found in any oral or written personal accounts of those who survived the DK regime. This fact explains perfectly the variance in daily life practices within Khmer Rouge society during the DK period. Not only does it impact the ways in which local people memorialize the victims of the Khmer Rouge today (including having victims' bodies recovered for Buddhist funeral rituals), the practice also indicates the extent to which Khmer Rouge local authorities utilized their power to implement the policy. Even though this fact rings true in the case of Prek Ta Meak, the practice is specific to this locality and may not be found in other places.

### **Alternatives to the Memorial**

Individual narratives of the sites of violence have become a critical means by which memories of the Khmer Rouge regime are preserved. Despite the state's efforts to construct national narratives about the genocide in Cambodia at the state and local levels, such actions have not been consistently maintained over time and space. For example, in cases of local memorials as discussed above, the local authorities and the common villagers have gradually neglected the stupa memorial at Prek Ta Meak. Although commemorative events continue to be held annually at the site, and in some years, at the local schools, and memorializing rituals are performed as individual families and as part of the *Pchum Ben* ceremony, less attention has been given to preservation of the memorial and human remains. This fact, coupled with the lack of effort in marking sites of violence in the commune, including the Chamkar Siv Prison and the mass graves, has raised the concerns of most of the survivors and former Khmer Rouge members with whom I have talked. Further, the lack of historical narratives for sites such as the Khmer Rouge hospital and commune office, which

have since been incorporated into the productive space of public and private institutions, has generated concern among individual survivors who would prefer that this knowledge be transferred to the younger generation.

As exemplified in Prek Ta Meak, sites of violence that provide evidence of the mass violence that took place in the village have gradually been disappearing from the contemporary landscape. As discussed in previous sections, emphasis has been focused on other major sites of violence, such as Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek. This lack of acknowledgment of sites of local violence concerns some villagers. “I regret that some physical evidence is no longer preserved for the younger generation. Some places where thousands of victims died no longer have any remaining evidence to show [what happened] to the younger generation” (Author’s interview with Thy, July 10, 2014). The villager reiterates that documents or physical evidence such as skulls or bones should be preserved to provide evidence of the crimes and mass violence committed by the Khmer Rouge. This idea, as discussed earlier, has generally been accepted among Cambodians as an appropriate means for demonstrating proof of the crimes against humanity and other genocidal crimes committed during the regime. Although the preservation of criminal evidence, including victim remains, has been controversial and consideration regarding whether the remains should have been cremated in accordance with Buddhist tradition (to set the spirits of the deceased free) has been long-debated, victim remains continue to naturally decay without appropriate museological preservation (see a detailed discussion in Thompson 2013). Beyond serving merely as evidence of the crimes committed, the manner in which victims’ remains and memorials are treated retain particular meaning with the local villagers with regard to remembrance of victims of crimes of atrocity. People feel that it is important to retain this concrete evidence for the purposes of past remembrance and for the future enlightenment of survivors, particularly the young population.

The idea that an alternative to the local physical memorials should be developed to raise



awareness among members of the younger generation resonated among many survivors. One suggestion is to develop public education to teach children about the Khmer Rouge—who they were, what their society was like, and why the violence took place. For example, Thy believes that children should be exposed to audio-visual media, including films and public displays of photographs, so that they can visualize the past events and gain a better understanding of the violence that happened in the country. Personal narratives are powerful and essential in preserving memory and disseminating knowledge of what happened under the Khmer Rouge regime. However, most villagers feel that they are not enough to help children believe and acknowledge the suffering of their parents. Furthermore, they believe that children find it very difficult to believe how the Khmer Rouge treated its own population. “I think even if I keep telling them, children still do not believe me 100 percent. It’s hard for them to believe that such an atrocity could have taken place in their country and against their parents” (Author’s interview with Thy, July 10, 2014). Another villager, who was a former prisoner at Chamkar Siv, agrees that it is necessary to provide additional learning materials as a tool for children to learn about what happened under the Khmer Rouge regime. He said, “I believe I can explain to young people what happened [during the Khmer Rouge regime]. I can tell them what it was like during the previous regime and then how it became during the Khmer Rouge regime. [However] when we have no evidence, I agree that it is hard to make young people believe us. They can deny that it was true. But having documents, memorials, and commemoration ceremonies would help to educate young people and make them believe in what we say.” (Author’s interview with Doeun, June 10, 2014) Besides public education, there was a reference to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal as a way to establish the truth and educate young people about the crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge regime. A villager states:

The tribunal is beneficial for the generation of survivors and their children to understand what happened and learn the truth. ... Although it doesn’t bring back my family members, I am glad that this tribunal is recording the history of Cambodia and leaving a legacy for the

younger generation. People can learn from that mistake and know that those who commit wrong have to be accountable for their actions. Even after those former leaders die, a history and legacy of the past still remains for younger people to study (Author's interview with Thida, July 22, 2014).

Producing visual materials and incorporating them into the landscape is important.

However, it is equally critical that a formal curriculum about Khmer Rouge history be developed, outside of family discussion, to foster dialogue about the Khmer Rouge regime. There are several references to the roles played by formal education, textbook, and classroom interaction in teaching the younger generation about the DK regime. Formal education formalizes the narratives told by survivors and former Khmer Rouge members. It also offers an opportunity for the younger generation to question why violence was so pervasive throughout the regime and what they should do to help prevent it from recurring. As suggested by a survivor:

I think children should study what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime so that they can prevent such an atrocity from happening again. They should also learn that they must not follow in the steps of the former leaders and should never support leaders whose actions will lead the country into tragedy. To remember what happens over time, children should receive formal education about the regime at school. After the survivor generation passes, the younger generation finds it more difficult to learn the history (Author's interview with Hong, June 9, 2014)

These quotes demonstrate the significant role of both formal and informal education—delivered through various means including textbooks, formal school curricula, visual materials, and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal—in passing on the DK narratives to members of younger generations, in particular the generations of the survivors' children and grandchildren. In fact, many nonprofit organizations have achieved success in having the history of the DK regime incorporated into the school curriculum. Among other organizations, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), based in Phnom Penh, has played an important role in the dissemination of DK education to the public. Established in 1995 as a field office of Yale University's Cambodian Genocide Program to facilitate field research on Khmer Rouge crimes in Cambodia, DC-Cam became an independent research institute in 1997. DC-Cam has collected, catalogued, and disseminated information on the

DK regime to survivors, researchers, students, and the general public. Its archive stores a million pages of Khmer Rouge documents, photographs, interviews, and physical evidence of the genocide. The documentary evidence held by the Center has informed much of the preparation for the prosecution cases of the former Khmer Rouge leaders in the trials underway at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. At the same time, DC-Cam has made a significant effort to educate the public about the DK regime through outreach, public education forums, exhibitions, and genocide education programs. DC-Cam published a textbook, entitled *A History of Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979*, in 2007 and distributed copies to all secondary high schools throughout the country. In addition, the Center has integrated the textbook and the lessons about the DK regime into the formal curriculum at the secondary high school level and provided training to all history and social science high school teachers.

Moreover, the Center has established outreach and exhibition programs outside of the formal classroom setting to provide education about the DK regime to survivors as well as their children and grandchildren. In 2014 the Center opened exhibitions, entitled *The Forced Transfer*, at eight provincial museums throughout Cambodia, featuring the forced evacuations of the population and life under the DK regime. Since 2006, it has also conducted outreach programs to bring commune and district leaders to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal so that they may participate in the trials of the Khmer Rouge leaders. These community leaders are expected to return to their respective villages and hold public forums to discuss life experiences under the DK regime and their participation in the trial of the Khmer Rouge leaders. This platform allows space for sharing stories and experiences and promotes dialogue between survivors and members of the younger generation. The open forums provide opportunities for survivors and young people to share stories and experiences. A former commune chief of Prek Ta Meak informed me that he had participated in a tour of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in 2007 with other leaders from different provinces. He recalled visiting Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Killing Field Memorial as part of

the tour. He also said he had an opportunity to meet with officials from the Tribunal who spoke to the group and answered questions related to the Tribunal and the trial proceedings. The former commune chief recounted that these experiences stimulated his interest in news of the Tribunal and the Khmer Rouge regime in general. He also used the opportunity to start a conversation with his children about his personal experiences during the DK regime (author's interview, July 2014). Aside from seeking justice for the victims, another important role of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal is to promote dialogue about past history among the survivors and members of the younger generations. The Tribunal facilitates a safe and open space for conversation among various sectors of the population. This work, coupled with other local initiatives, provides the necessary means for educating the younger generations about life during the DK regime.

In addition, DC-Cam has been instrumental in facilitating and preserving memory of the Khmer Rouge regime through the solicitation of survivors' diaries and stories, translation and publishing of research relating to the genocide, promotion of contemporary arts about the genocide, and other similar initiatives. This work, along with the programs mentioned earlier, has facilitated discussion about the genocide among the local population as well as the international community, ensuring that memories of the Khmer Rouge regime will be passed on from the generation of survivors to their children. Thompson considers DC-Cam's archival programs and activities to have contributed to "an increased production of commemorative practices" (2013: 94). In addition to providing the means for commemoration of the tragic past, this work plays an important role in bridging the generational gap between survivors and their children and narrowing the historical distances of the recent past. Ultimately, the formal and informal public efforts to provide education to the younger generation have addressed some concerns among the survivors about passing DK narratives on to their children and grandchildren. This work, formalized or not, contributes to commemorative practices of the recent tragic past and serves as an alternative to the physical memorials that have been long-neglected or left to decay in the

Buddhist tradition of memorial practices.

## **Summary**

This chapter has described the sites of violence and accounts of survivors who lived and worked among those sites during and after the DK period. This research has closely examined the sites to provide detailed accounts regarding what events occurred at each place and people's experiences of those events during the DK regime. Due to the fact that the sites are not physically remarkable in the landscape, the site narratives related by survivors who bore witness to what happened can enlighten our understanding of the violence that took place there. The narratives, which describe the daily administration and decisions of Khmer Rouge authorities, shed light on the events that ultimately led to death, torture, and hard labor in the region. This outcome resulted primarily from policies handed down from state apparatus and the implementation of those policies by authorities at the local level. Therefore, while physical remains of the violence have diminished from the landscape, survivors' narratives stand as an important source of knowledge to contribute to our understanding of why such brutal and violent events occurred during the DK period. Memories of these sites have not had a primary influence on the national narrative of recent past history, and thus the sites have not been identified as main memorial sites. Nevertheless they are important in providing a more complete understanding of the DK regime.

Survivors' narratives remain powerful, especially as living testaments to what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime. While the memorial at Prek Ta Meak has fallen into disrepair and neglect, this study demonstrates that the narratives make a valuable contribution to the study of survivors' experiences and memory of the violence that took place at the local level. The study suggests that the politics of memory remains one of the most significant factors in the way past violence is memorialized. At the local level, the economy and the disconnect between people's lives and the memorial are other elements that contribute to the way in which people remember and

memorialize violence. In addition, the case study has demonstrated that individual villagers choose their own way to memorialize the dead and commemorate the past. Although the collective commemorations, such as the May 20<sup>th</sup> Day of Remembrance or January 7<sup>th</sup> Day of Liberation, continue to take place in the village, it is argued that they are celebrated as part of a government-sponsored event. In accordance with the majority Cambodian's Buddhist tradition, the locals continue to perform individuals and families religious rituals as well as participate in *Pchum Ben* ceremony to make offerings to the deceased who suffered from the violent death during the DK regime, particularly from illness, execution, and starvation. Despite the fact that the physical memorial has received less attention and the national commemorative events have served solely certain political goals, the practices of family and national Buddhist rituals have increasingly become the needs for the living individuals to restore cosmic orders of the deceased who suffered from violent death during the DK regime. The local collective memory and acts of memorialization therefore remain invisible in the memorial landscape of Prek Ta Meak.

Although individual memories are significant in establishing a more complete picture of the DK regime, the study also suggests that they are not sufficient in addressing the challenges facing Cambodians in their effort to preserve memories of the Khmer Rouge. In other words, living memorials such as survivors' stories alone cannot adequately address our understanding of the past. For a site where physical memorials or markers are limited in the landscape, and thus the violence associated with that site remains hidden, the study reveals that survivors are concerned that their children and other members of younger generations will be unable to learn about Khmer Rouge history and understand their experiences during the regime. The survivors suggest that formal education as well as public displays of photographs or other media tools in informal settings would be helpful in addressing these concerns. The efforts made by some nonprofit organizations, including DC-Cam, have partly addressed these concerns. The archival work of DC-Cam not only serves to build historical records of the DK history, but it also contributes to the commemorative

practices of among the local populations and negotiate passage of DK narratives from the survivors to the other members of the younger generations. The next chapter discusses the relationship between individual and national memories and the differences in the narratives of base and new people.

## **Chapter Five: Narratives of Individual Survivors in Landscapes of Violence**

This chapter examines the relationship of survivors' narratives vis-à-vis the dominant, national narratives. Although narratives of men and women who lived through the Khmer Rouge regime and the period following the genocide years tend to counter the patterns of narratives constructed by dominant groups or the government, some narratives of individuals emerge to follow or reference the dominant stories.

This chapter also looks at the ways in which narratives of the base people differ from those of the new people. Stories related by base people center on revealing one's own identity, justification for the past actions, and response to the current political situation. Conversely, narratives of the new people reveal the tragedy of the living and working conditions, separation of family members, and personal suffering. Thus, the narratives shared by participants in this study embody diverse experiences. There is no uniformity to the lived experiences of base and new people, but rather a complexity of life. If, as commented in Borden (1992: 135), narratives are the construction process which explains negative results or the impacts of loss or changes, then the participants in this study utilize this process to construct varied narratives to explain their past life experiences and rebuild their lives in the present. Personal memories of men and women during DK are built in this context. Nonetheless, some clear motivation from the national narratives emerges, largely as a reflection of political changes. The grey line of this memory process is the focus of this section.

Given the differences in their past experiences, this chapter examines individual narratives in the context of social formation. Specifically, it explores: 1) the relationship of the national and



individual memory; and 2) the narratives of the new and base people. The discussions of these narratives will be examined in the context of three historical events: the evacuation, social organization and labor force, and the return home.

### **Individual vs. National Narratives: Variance in Memory Construction**

As James Young comments, “Memory is never shaped in a vacuum; the motives of memory are never pure” (1993: 2). The personal memory that survivors construct is as various and complex as the past experiences themselves. Some of these memories are built based on group interactions, socio-political institutions, and cultural practices (Halbwachs 1992, cited in Alderman and Inwood 2013: 188). Narratives of Khmer Rouge experiences revealed them to be constructed and shaped in the context of social, cultural, and political formations. The survivors went through a multiplicity of processes that affected the ways in which they imagine themselves and narrate their own experiences. Although it is common for the survivors to begin their narratives with personal and family experiences, the narratives of the past were developed in relation to the broader narratives of the nation. The state narrative, as constructed by the PRK regime and portrayed through Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, describes the extremely brutal experiences and violence that took place during the DK period. In extension, it states that the small group of criminals who took power in 1975 committed genocide against their population and was finally removed from power three years later by the PRK, which was the true revolutionary group. The state narrative of the DK regime highlights the horrendous experiences of the population, including execution and torture, shared across geographical regions as evidenced by the mass graves discovered throughout the country. It also generally describes living and working conditions during DK as harsh across time and space—schools and hospitals were closed, money and markets were abolished, and all towns were evacuated. There are several references to the dominant narratives of the Khmer Rouge

regime. In some cases, for example, references were frequently made to the former Khmer Rouge prison S-21, which was transformed into a museum by the PRK. In other cases, through social interactions and exposure to social narratives, the participants described their personal experiences in connection with major events, such as the evacuation, executions, or organization of society during the Khmer Rouge regime.

These accounts are not inaccurate, but they only present some aspects of the Khmer Rouge society and its policies and practices and leave out other aspects. As previously discussed, considering the regional and zonal variance in policies and practices of the DK, the experiences of survivors are diverse and thus reflect the leadership and policy implementation within a specific region. Michael Vickery has examined the experiences of Cambodians who survived the Khmer Rouge regime. He argues that most narratives that have been collected by reporters and journalists demonstrated the most extreme and brutal accounts of some people, but do not represent the experiences of the majority who lived across different geographic regions under the DK regime (Vickery 1984). He suggests the narratives of lives under the DK period that is standardized across time and geographical space as the 'Standard Total View' (STV) in the discussion about Khmer Rouge survivors' experiences during the DK period. The STV is generally held that "the regime deliberately abolished schooling, medical care, and religion; sought to destroy the family, in particular by tearing children from parents; and, through deliberate efforts to deprive the population of an adequate diet, caused the deaths of a large number of those people who escaped the extermination dragnet" (Vickery 1984: 36). It is clear that life under the DK regime was not conformed to a single narrative and that the experiences living under the DK regime were varied across geographical regions and time. As discussed in Chapter One, the explanation of these variances depends primarily on their background, the leadership and policies of certain zones and regions, and the network they connected to. However, the STV presents some challenges in the context that Vickery utilized to describe the experiences of refugees who lived along the border

camps. He states that the history of the DK regime was completely distorted to provide narratives that are entirely untrue. He also states that Cambodian survivors told the most horrific stories, not the stories of base people, in an effort to leave the camp and be relocated in other countries. They therefore made up stories that caught the attention of the world (Vickery 1984). Ledgerwood argues that the experiences of urbanites who endured starvation, disease, and malnutrition under the hard working conditions of the DK regime were also shared by peasants or base people (1997: 93). She adds that the stories about “forced marriage, restrictions on movement, separation from their children, collective dining,” and other conditions under the DK were also experienced by base people (Ledgerwood 1997: 93). Although there are many differences in experiences of the survivors depending on where they lived and worked, their social status, and their background and the STV provides only a narrative that include some inaccuracies in facts in general, we also have to be aware of the context in which the STV was established.

In this case study, the accounts of survivors—the base and new people—vary greatly from one to another depending upon the geographical landscapes in which they lived. I will now explore these experiences through individual narratives drawn from the interviews. The evacuation, life during the DK regime, and other significant events recounted in the survivors’ narrations will be examined through the lens of several survivors, including both base and new people.

## **Evacuation**

The forced evacuation of cities and towns following the Khmer Rouge takeover of Phnom Penh was a turning point for men, women, and children. The evacuations drove them out of their homes to the countryside, from which they were unable to return in many cases. In addition, evacuation resulted in the dramatic separation of family members, death, starvation, and more importantly, the subsequently harsh treatment of individuals by Khmer Rouge authorities. The evacuation of Phnom Penh and the provincial towns was not a snap decision. It was formally made

at a February 1975 meeting of the central committee of the CPK, but the party had planned the capital's evacuation even before this official sanctioning (Jackson 1989: 51). The specifics of the evacuation plan were unclear, resulting in violence and a high death toll. Violence committed against the population during the evacuation was only one aspect of a series of violent acts that the regime perpetuated against its citizens. Subsequent actions, such as categorizing the population into class designations, significantly impacted the degree of harsh treatment to which individuals were subjected in the following years (Jackson 1989).

In addition to traumatic experiences suffered during the evacuation process, Phnom Penh residents subsequently experienced further distress when they began to resettle in new locations. Most of the evacuees were told to travel to their native village or to the hometown of their relatives. As a result of this strategy, base people who had formerly been their relatives and neighbors often revealed the identities of returning individuals. In some cases, evacuees ultimately resettled in a place in which they had never been and where the base people were assigned to receive them. Most evacuees were forced to provide a brief biography upon their arrival. Those who understood the objectives of the revolution managed to hide their true identities, while others who reported their true background became targets for execution or detention.

The evacuation process and its consequences examined here demonstrate the experiences of city residents who were originally from the capital city, Phnom Penh, as well as those who had fled the countryside to the relative safety of the city just before the civil war. These individuals who had relocated to Phnom Penh were thus evacuated in the mass exodus of the city as if they had been permanent residents.<sup>8</sup> They have various backgrounds and stories to relate about their experiences and scenes they witnessed. Common images they share include the terrified scene of travelers along

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<sup>8</sup> The other primary genres of narratives of the DK era are the first person narratives. There are dozens of these now and it could certainly be argued that their narratives too must be structured according to dominant patterns and that there are certain things that must be included for them to be considered true eye witness accounts, including seeing dead bodies on the street, pregnant women about to delivered or patients who had just been forced out of the hospital.

the evacuation route, the saddened mass of crowds, and the dead bodies lying along the road. They recall the way in which the soldiers treated the evacuees, their living conditions while being forced to leave the city, and the unforeseen fates of them and their family members. All recall how they were in a state of confusion and loss, and experienced the separation of family members and loss of property. The basic necessities that they had packed and brought along included cooking pots, rice, food, a few changes of clothing, and personal belongings, most of which was confiscated by the Khmer Rouge soldiers upon arrival at their final destination. While the interviewees were not targets of execution during the evacuation because they did not hold risky positions as soldiers of the Lon Nol regime, their relatives, in some cases, were targets. All of these survivors used their modest skills to hide their real identities, while making use of family relationships with the base people to survive, although trauma would haunt them throughout their life afterward.

When the Khmer Rouge soldiers entered the capital city of Phnom Penh, people gratefully cheered them with mixed reactions. Many thought that the country was finally at peace after years of armed conflict. Others who had a better understanding of the revolutionary forces were skeptical regarding whether they would bring a prosperous future to the country. Nonetheless, these mixtures of emotions were abruptly clarified through the swift action taken by the Khmer Rouge forces upon their arrival in the city. Any hope for peace turned into a nightmare when the Khmer Rouge announced the evacuation of the city. Instead of calming the chaos that had seized the whole country, the Khmer Rouge forced the residents to leave the city. People in the capital were confused by the orders put forward by the Khmer Rouge soldiers and at the uncertainty of their future. The soldiers ordered them to leave their houses immediately and told them to bring only a few of their belongings. They were ordered to leave in all directions, the north, south, east and west. It was quite a confusing situation, yet none of them managed to resist the order. Consequently, within a week, the capital city was evacuated and the population was dispatched to various locations throughout the country.

In April 1975, when Khmer Rouge soldiers entered Phnom Penh, Bopha lived with her extended family—eight members in total. They had fled their home village in Prek Ta Meak Commune, in part to escape the widening civil war between the Khmer Rouge and the republican forces of Lon Nol. Her family also hoped that Bopha would somehow be able to attend high school. When the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh, however, Bopha and her family were forcibly removed. They became part of the massive exodus of humanity, as the Khmer Rouge evacuated the city and resettled nearly three million people in work communes throughout the country. This is how Bopha came to live near Kampong Damrei; this is how she came to work in a mobile youth brigade.

In 1972, Kunthea had married a soldier in the republican forces of Lon Nol and moved to Phnom Penh. On the eve of the evacuation day, April 17, 1975, she heard gunshots striking all over the city. The nighttime gunfire was intense and she had to move to another part of the city to find refuge with her brother. When the Khmer Rouge forces arrived in the city, they began searching for soldiers who had served the Lon Nol republican forces and ordered the mass evacuation of the whole city.

There is no clear explanation regarding why people were evacuated from the city. A few reasons for the evacuation can be established through Khmer Rouge documents and survivors' stories. The Khmer Rouge offered several reasons for the evacuations. Firstly, the Khmer Rouge told the Phnom Penh residents that they were evacuating the city to protect people from American bombing. This reason was plausible given the extraordinary carpet bombing that took place in the country between 1968 and 1973. A number of people fled from their villages to Phnom Penh to escape the bombings. Secondly, there was a fear of food shortages. DK's Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ieng Sary provided the justification in an interview with Newsweek magazine that the country did not have enough transportation to supply food for city populations, many of whom had fled into the city seeking refuge from the bombing and the civil war. He

repeated the claim that people (city dwellers) had to be evacuated to the countryside because there was no food in Phnom Penh (Stuart-Fox 1986: 7). Thirdly, another reason suggested by Ieng Sary (and later by Pol Pot) concerned the security of the new leadership. The leaders claimed that the U.S. Intelligence Agency (CIA) and former members of the Lon Nol regime could engage in subversive activities against the new regime. The justifications offered by the Khmer Rouge seemed reasonable to the residents, although they appeared to contradict the initial signs of peace that people hoped would prevail in the nation after the end of the war. Regardless of the reasons for the evacuation, many survivors reaffirmed that they were told to leave Phnom Penh immediately after the Khmer Rouge marched into the city. Kunthea recalled that they ordered her family to leave the city so that they could start searching for enemies of the revolution.

The evacuation was linked to the perceived moral degeneration of urban areas. As noted in the words of a Radio Phnom Penh broadcast by the Khmer Rouge, the evacuation was intended to “clean up and eliminate the filth of the rotten old society” (McIntyre 1997, 730). This statement defined a critical link between the former regime and the [decaying] morality of the society, in that there was perceived to be a moral and spiritual disconnect which required sweeping clean. Such a justification factored into the planned evacuation and resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths, with the new people (city residents) subsequently being singled out as targets.

Kunthea described the forced evacuation as the most unforgettable and terrifying experience of her life. She left the city along with her husband, brother, and some relatives. The common scene she witnessed along the way included horrible images of dead bodies, patients being forced out of hospitals, and pregnant women who were about to give birth on the roadside. The horrendous tragedy did not end with the forced transfers, but ultimately resulted in the terribly painful experiences of her husband’s execution. At first, having been relocated to Preaek Ta Meak, her husband and brother, who were both Lon Nol soldiers, managed to hide their identities from the Khmer Rouge authorities through the protection of her parents, who had resided in the village

long before. However, not long after they resettled in the village, the Khmer Rouge discovered their real identities and targeted them for execution. It was in the very location in which she grew up that she was forced to endure the pain of loss, hard labor, suspicion, and separation from family members during the DK regime.

Instead of ending their journey in Prek Ta Meak Commune, some of the other survivor interviewees and their families were redirected to provinces in northwestern Cambodia as their destination. An essential characteristic of the DK regime was the constant relocation of its population. People were repeatedly and forcibly moved from one location to another—from their place of birth to a different zone and from a village to a cooperative to a worksite. Mobility defines one of the most important characteristics of the DK administration.

Before 1970, Thida lived in the capital city of Phnom Penh. Thida was a high school student in Phnom Penh when the Khmer Rouge captured the capital city. She had moved to the city before 1970, when the country was in a relatively stable state. She studied at Tuol Svay Prey High School, which DK later converted into the infamous S-21 prison and torture center. She was forcibly evacuated from the city to her home village in Prek Ta Meak, after which she was constantly relocated to the northwest. Thida and her family, similar to other families in the village, were transported by boat to Bakan District, Pursat Province. Thida recalls the city evacuation as a horrendous event for her family and the whole city population. “We managed to get back to Prek Ta Meak. Not long after we arrived there, the Khmer Rouge forced us to make the trip to Pursat Province. We were not able to plead with them or refuse the assignment. We had to go. We knew that living conditions in the new place wouldn’t be better than living in our home village, but we were afraid that the Khmer Rouge would kill us. So we agreed to go.” Along with a crowd of Phnom Penh evacuees, Thida and her family reached the destination in Bakan District by boat and train and ended up living there for the rest of the Khmer Rouge period. She says, “They [the Khmer Rouge] kept us there for one or two nights, before we continued our journey by train. I had no idea where



the train would take us. Once we arrived at the location, ox carts were waiting to pick us up. Nobody could choose where they were taken.” The fate of Thida, her family, and the villagers who shared the journey with her was unknown. She continues:

If we got on the same ox carts, we would end up staying at the same village. If we got on a different ox cart, we would end up living at a different village. There were many ox carts waiting to receive us. In that area, villages were far away from one another. You couldn’t identify each village since [the land] was covered by forest. They sent me to Tram Seh Village, Bakan District, Pursat Province.” (Author’s interview, July 22, 2014)

### **Social Organization and Labor Force**

After the forced evacuation on April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge quickly began to establish collectivization, one facet of the eight-point plan for immediate implementation directed by Pol Pot. This plan aimed to confiscate all private property and turn it over to the Khmer Rouge organization for collective use. Cooperatives were established to serve this purpose. Some cooperatives already existed in the liberated zones after May 1973 under the name of the Peasant Co-operative Organization, but they were implemented on a large scale in 1976 (Chandler and others 1988: 5). From 1973 to later than 1975, the organization of cooperatives varied in size and place. ‘Mutual aid teams’ comprised of 10 to 30 families were organized into ‘low-level cooperatives,’ which consisted of several hundred people. By 1977, low-level cooperatives were organized into ‘high-level cooperatives,’ which comprised an entire commune (Dy 2007: 29). These formations marked the increasing militarization of economic production. Hong, who was assigned to a mobile unit in Prek Ta Meak Commune, says that the working conditions were harsh and difficult to bear if one was weak. In his mobile unit, workers of his age (20s) were required to undertake additional assignments in other sub-districts, such as digging canals, building dikes, and planting rice (author’s interview, June 9, 2014).

Khmer Rouge efforts to transform Cambodia into an agricultural-based country stressed the huge engagement of manpower in the work force. Restructuring of the labor force meant that every

member of the family played a role in the collectivization efforts of the regime. In economic terms, the family was considered incompatible with collectivization and viewed as oppressive to those efforts. Male and female manpower was to be designed and based entirely on the economic and political objectives of DK. Hence, the cooperative leaders assigned all family members to the workforce as members of units, brigades, or other groups in order to maximize the labor force. In addition, individualism had to be replaced by collectivization.

### *Base and new people*

While the Khmer Rouge repeatedly claimed to have eliminated inequalities within society, mainly by removing the division between oppressed and oppressors, they created a new class category of urbanites-intellectuals, ruling elites, and civil servants, all of whom served the former regime. Such a practice clearly contradicted their assertion of social equality. The immediate elevation of the peasant class to the dominant ruling group as opposed to suppression of the former urban elites contributed to the practice of inequality during the DK regime. In a speech by Khieu Samphan<sup>9</sup> during the celebration of the third anniversary of the revolution in 1977, he confirmed the argument:

We must carry on the task of defending our Democratic Cambodia, protecting our worker-peasant administration and preserving the fruits of our Cambodian revolution by resolutely suppressing all categories of enemies... we must wipe out the enemy in our capacity as masters of the situation... Everything must be done neatly and thoroughly (quoted in Jackson 1989, 57)

His statement directly alludes to the regime's policy of suppressing the former ruling class, especially those residing in the city, who used to oppress the poor and peasants and were therefore considered enemies of the state. The new DK constitution, which was disseminated in January 1976, coined different categories in society such as "workers, poor farmers, middle farmers, lower

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<sup>9</sup> Khieu Samphan was DK's Head of State between 1976 and 1979. He has been convicted of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and is facing the second phase of trials at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal under the charge of genocide against the Cham Muslims and Vietnamese.

level farmers, and other laborers in the countryside and in the cities,” to classify the Cambodian population (Chapter II, Article 2, *DK Constitution* 1976; Chandler, 1976). The new constitution placed extensive emphasis on the peasant class that emerged after the revolution. It added that these categories comprise “more than 95 percent of the Cambodian nation” (*DK Constitution*, 1976). Although class categories were commonly known as two major groups—“new people” and “base people”—the population of DK was specifically divided into three categories, depending upon class background and political past: individuals with full rights (base people), those who were candidates for full rights (candidates), and those who had no rights (new people) (Locard 2004). Although conditions varied based on the region, members of the new privileged group (base people) generally received full food rations and were allowed to join any organization, including the party and army (Kiernan 2004). According to the DK Constitution, members of this group, which consisted primarily of peasants with a clean background, were granted special rights to vote (Dy 2007). Although the practice of social classification was regularly implemented in society, David Chandler (1976) commented that the Constitution presented a differentiation of the new regime from the Cambodian past and presented a new form of exploitation with the promotion of new privilege groups.

In determining their class in society, new and base people were divided to fit into the labor organizations that the Khmer Rouge had designed. Stories told by base and new people describe their experiences living and working under the DK regime, their relationships, and their distinct roles in society as part of this class-based society controlled by the Khmer Rouge authorities.

At the age of 15, Kong was recruited by the local Khmer Rouge authorities as a medical staff member at the district level hospital in the compound of Prek Ta Meak’s present secondary high school. He was a base person, which was a category of social class within the DK organization. He recalls the work he carried out as part of his assignment from the DK health department. He recounts the living and working conditions inside the hospital and asserts that the hospital leaders

treated the staff and patients better than in other places. He had heard about the living conditions of new people and other ordinary villagers from the accounts of survivors. Compared to that of new people, living conditions of the medical staff were relatively better in terms of food rations and workload. In terms of operation of the hospital, Kong recognized that medical procedures in the hospital were somewhat acceptable and medical specialization was clearly assigned to staff members. Although many patients did not receive proper treatment and eventually died, he acknowledged that the Khmer Rouge made some effort to treat patients and provide relatively proper burials to those who died.

Narratives of base and new people in the village become increasingly different as they describe in detail their respective living and working conditions. Living and working conditions of new people were generally harsher than those of base people, although circumstances varied depending upon location. New people were usually provided less food, endured family separations, and were assigned more work. Generally, villagers were assigned to different work units based on their age and marital status. Single people were assigned to mobile units to undertake hard labor such as building dams and digging canals, while those who were in their 70s or 80s were placed in the 'grandparent' unit, in which they performed light tasks such as babysitting children whose parents were away at work.

In contrast to the narratives of the base people, new people described their lives as more difficult and as receiving less tolerance from the Khmer Rouge.

All of Thida's family members who were evacuated to Pursat died from starvation and overwork, except for her father who was taken away by the Khmer Rouge and never returned. For Thida, life was extremely difficult, as she had to work extra hard in exchange for little food. She recollects how she was placed into different working units and assigned various jobs. "In the first few months after we arrived, we were organized to live at the new village and were provided with enough food. They placed us into different units such as children, old-aged, and middle-aged units

in the cooperatives..." (author's interview, July 22, 2014). As a member of the middle-aged unit, she was assigned to work in the rice fields, transplanting rice seedlings and harvesting rice. Even worse, she was unable to see her family members since each of them had been assigned to work separately. "Sometimes I had to run fast to the village to see my family and I had to get back as quickly as I could to the hut. If my unit chief found out that I was missing from the place, I would be in trouble." (author's interview, July 22, 2014) The fear of being tortured as a consequence of making mistakes was traumatic to her. As she describes it here:

Sometimes they woke us up at 4:00 in the morning to go to work. I managed to escape a few times because I was too sleepy to get up... But I could not go back to sleep for I was afraid that they would come after me... Fearing that they would come check on me, I got up and went to work. The work sites were far away from where we stayed. There was no clock to check how long it took to walk from the cooperatives to the work sites. We looked at the sun to guess the time. If the sun was right overhead it was noon, if the sun was rising, it was 5:00 or 6:00 a.m. (author's interview, July 22, 2014).

Subsequently, the food ration was reduced to a minimum, while the labor remained the same. "In 1977, they started to reduce our food ration and many people died from starvation. Women who had recently given birth suffered from a lack of nutrition and died from starvation and lack of medical care as a consequence." (author's interview, July 22, 2014).

In addition to having a heavier workload than base people, the lives of new people were more fragile. They were usually considered untrustworthy, and were therefore under constant scrutiny by the base people. Many educated city residents were regarded as capitalists or feudalists or contaminated by foreign influences which could be harmful to the revolution. As a new person, Thida was living under deep suspicion. She was asked about her biography every month to uncover inconsistencies in her response. She managed to provide the same answer every time she was called to provide the biographies. However, not every new person was fortunate enough to hide his or her identity. Bopha, upon arrival and resettlement in her new home, was falsely accused of being an enemy against the revolution. The Khmer Rouge accused her of writing English script on a

bathroom door. She was subsequently arrested and sent to the district's Chamkar Siv detention center, where she was imprisoned and forced to perform hard labor for almost three years. The Khmer Rouge knew that she had been educated in Phnom Penh, so they accused her of being opposed to the revolution (author's interview, June 9, 2014).

## **Returning Home**

Although many new people were evacuated to the same Northwest zone and later returned to their home village of Prek Ta Meak, their lives during and following the Khmer Rouge years have been very different based on the villages to which they were relocated. In Thida's case, almost all of her family members died of starvation and lack of medical care in the new location. Other survivors relate that they were the sole survivor in their family and thus the experiences they endured were enormously traumatic. "All of my family members were evacuated to Battambang by boat, truck, and train. There were seven of us in total. I had three sisters and two other brothers. We were transported to the village in Pursat by oxcart. After the fall of the regime, I was the only one who survived" (Author's interview with Teng, July 2014). Each of the survivors had to begin from scratch to rebuild their lives while continuously coping with their past trauma. They had barely survived the regime, so their suffering was tremendous and impossible to describe.

After the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, not all survivors returned to their home villages. Some remained living in the villages to which they had been relocated. In either case, they developed an imagined space of violence through their interactions with physical places in which they were living and working in the present. Although they had been relocated to new villages and had first-hand experiences at those places, they recall their past experiences through their present interactions with the sites of trauma. Their relationship to the sites is expressed through narratives of everyday geographies at the mundane level. Their daily, banal activities within the sites of trauma, such as at Chamkar Siv with the mass graves and physical buildings surrounding it, serve as

a vivid reminder of the experiences they endured at that location where they used to live. In this sense, memories are not necessarily connected to the exact place in which a person directly experienced violence, but can be stirred by a similar environment that brings their past experiences to mind.

## **Discussion**

When discussing the Khmer Rouge regime, much of what has been written relating to the living and working conditions of people who lived through the period recounts inhumane experiences under Khmer Rouge rule. Medical treatment was considered poor and ineffective. Living and working conditions, especially for new people, were extremely difficult. Countless people lost their life as a consequence of the lack of basic food and proper medical care. In addition, some dominant patterns make reference to the deadly experiences of the DK period. For example, one narrative relates that during the final days of the regime, the Khmer Rouge prepared to poison the remaining population at banquets and that people were ordered to dig trenches that would ultimately become mass graves (Ledgerwood 1997: 93). This notion of killing as an act of genocide is a state narrative constructed by the PRK and was often included in the accounts of the STV. These dominant narratives follow the patterns presented in the curatorial work in evidence at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek.

Although some accounts related by Prek Ta Meak villagers did not completely conform to the dominant patterns told at the national level, they sometimes referred to state narratives as a foundation for making a comparison with their personal experiences. Memories of the evacuation as perceived individually by Bopha, Kuntea, and Thida shed light on the large events that affected people as a whole. Their narrations were full of confusion, horror, fear, future uncertainty, and reaction to the atrocities they witnessed. They narrated about their personal experiences as well as the incidents they witnessed, connecting their individual experiences to the broader context of the

Khmer Rouge ordeal. The survivors, more often than not, contextualized their stories within the larger narrative of the Khmer Rouge. For instance, Kunthea referred to the featured film *The Killing Fields*, which depicts the evacuation of the city and life experiences during DK. This reference helped the survivor draw a comparison between the events depicted in the film and her real life experiences so as to emphasize the scope of the suffering she endured. She asserts that the movie and other forms of artistic expression are not able to depict the horrendous reality of life under the regime as she lived it. In fact, the treatment of the population by the Khmer Rouge “was far worse and more horrific than what the film showed” (author’s interview, July 7, 2014). However, she comments that movies and other forms of media play an important role in educating younger children about the events that occurred.

Similarly, the brutality and violence portrayed in the dominant narratives do tend to evoke and reinforce individual survivors’ memories. In Thida’s narrative, people suffered from a lack of sufficient nutrition and medical care. As exemplified in her family story, her parents and other family members died one after the other from starvation, overwork, and lack of proper medical treatment at the local level. Ledgerwood suggests that even though survivors did not remember such direct violence for the entire period of the DK regime, there were “certainly the crucial, central memories of the worst individual moments of that era” (1997: 93). In talking with survivors, I discovered that while they may not necessarily narrate their experiences chronologically, they tend to focus on the events that were most significant in their life. The fragmented memories of the survivors were less connected to the larger political and historical narrative. The most consistent themes in their narratives were the starvation and hard labor which generally only the strongest people survived (Sanders 2006). Lawrence Langer’s concept of “deep memory” explains that in memory telling, normal patterns of narratives are disrupted as the worst memories of trauma surface (1991). This traumatic memory interrupts the smooth chronological patterns of the narratives. For this reason, many chronological patterns found in the narratives of survivors and



their families become distorted. Langer specifically compares the differences in structure between oral narratives and written narratives. Written narratives can be crafted over a long period of time, allowing the narrators to consider, compose, and reorganize their thoughts and stories in chronological order. In contrast, oral histories are generally premised in a way that does not provide narrators with advance knowledge of the questions, therefore precluding them from having the time to organize their stories chronologically. As a result, interviewees usually confuse dates and events, even though they are prompted at the beginning of the interview to respond chronologically. This pattern allows deep memory (or the most traumatic memories) of survivors to disrupt the flow of their narrative since the traumatic incidents take precedent as the memories unfold. Therefore, the deep memory of individuals recalls the horrible experiences of life during the DK regime, which they do not seem to be able to avoid. In Thida's narrative, the most horrible events that she experienced eventually interfered with the chronological order of her stories, and such memories often conform to the experiences espoused in dominant narratives. The death of family members due to the lack of food and proper health care is a common narrative of family tragedy for many Khmer Rouge survivors. However, in Thida's case, the fact that she witnessed all of her family members die, one after another, was her most traumatic memory.

Descriptions of life under the KR regime differ based upon the narrator—where they resided, where they worked, and the people with whom they were connected—although individual oral histories of Khmer Rouge survivors usually include the type of stories that Vickery refers to as STV. Among many accounts of survivors, narratives constructed by base and new people tend to stress the differences in living and working experiences of the two groups. In Kong's narrative, for example, those who lived through the regime as a member of the Khmer Rouge seemed to experience better living conditions than the new people. Kong, as a base person, indicates that his work assignment at the hospital was relatively easy. In his narrative, he asserts that the Khmer Rouge intended to protect life and provide adequate living conditions to the population by

providing health care and limited the spread of disease, for example. The moderate conditions of the hospital described in his narrative indicate some effectiveness in the health care system of DK. The hospital provided emergency service for patients with severe conditions and injections for those who did not require intensive care. Note that Kong's story serves as a counter-narrative to the larger narrative, which usually depicts the horror of the DK regime by emphasizing the extreme and brutal living conditions of the population during that time. This story reveals that the policies and practices implemented by the Khmer Rouge varied depending upon the region and zone and that individual survivors experiences were different based on their status and backgrounds.

Though new and base people were subject to relatively similar working conditions at Prek Ta Meak and in some cases evacuees were even appointed to coveted positions at the Khmer Rouge commune office, in general the larger narratives portrayed the evacuees as not to be trusted. Thus they were often punished for trivial incidents such as breaking a farm tool. As illustrated in the dominant narrative in Thida's story, as a new person she was subject to constant questioning by the Khmer Rouge authorities, even though she never erred in her responses or was involved in any incident deemed offensive by the Khmer Rouge. While this claim may be true for many new people who were evacuated to various places across the country, the experiences of new people also varied depending on geographical region, time, and personal background. Dominant narratives stress that being literate, speaking a foreign language, or wearing glasses could result in the accusation of being an enemy of the revolution and possible imprisonment or execution. According to one villager, he was selected by the Khmer Rouge to work as a commune clerk upon his arrival in Prek Ta Meak from Phnom Penh in April 1975 due to his ability to read and write. He had fled to Phnom Penh during the war in the 1970s and studied there until the fall of the city in 1975 (Author's interview with Cheam, July 9, 2014). Many evacuees describe their experiences of malnutrition, extreme work conditions, and continuous deaths of family members. They also describe that they are often perceived as being a suspect within the village given their previous association with the

imperialists and Lon Nol regime. While these accounts ring true to many new people's experiences and conform to the dominant narratives, some other accounts including the one described above counter to the larger narrative which states that all intellectuals and literate people were executed when the Khmer Rouge took power. Variations in personal experiences result from the fact that people resided and worked in different and distinct geographical locations and were connected to different groups of people. Thida was forced to transfer from Prek Ta Meak to the Northwest province of Battambang, while Cheam was evacuated from Phnom Penh to Prek Ta Meak Commune and resided there for the entire period of DK. Cheam had a relative who had joined the Khmer Rouge and who served on the leadership panel of the commune. He was offered a position as a commune clerk because of the assistance and connection provided by his relative. In contrast, Thida and her family were relocated to a region which was completely unknown to her, and where she could not benefit from connections to anyone living there. Thida was a new person whose experiences conform to the larger narratives told at the national level.

Through the individual perspectives of new and base people, we can also understand the extent to which policies related to social and health care, labor, and food were implemented and how the local leadership operated at the district, region, and zone level. The legacy of DK policies and the structural violence that pervaded its regime is manifested in the sites of prisons, mass graves, hospitals, and other structures in the landscape. More importantly, the legacy lives on in the memories of those who survived and who are striving to live among the sites of violence in the landscapes of contemporary Cambodia.

Ledgerwood (1997) argues that the state narratives constructed at the national level present a shared narrative of facts and events as described by many survivors today. The narrative framework constructed in the context of Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek condemns DK and portrays the horror of the era. The vivid images of victims' faces and torture materials played a significant role in invoking and reinforcing the memories of survivors. Thion argues that the PRK narrative served as

a propaganda tool to prevent Cambodian survivors from forming their own understanding of the DK regime (1993: 183). This argument is contested by Ledgerwood, who states, “The Khmer relied upon and responded to the PRK state narrative in creating their own understanding of the recent past,” while the PRK state constructed “the metanarrative” to frame and provide an explanation “for seemingly incomprehensible events” (Ledgerwood 1997: 93). I agree with the arguments provided by Ledgerwood in that individual oral narratives of survivors frequently make references to some factual events presented in the state narratives—including the stories of Tuol Sleng, detailed incidents during the evacuation, and the general living and working conditions in Khmer Rouge society—to create a plausible framework supporting their own understanding. They are able to use the dominant narratives to provide historical context for their own experiences, so that the audience can better relate to their personal stories. As reflected in the narratives of individual survivors in Prek Ta Meak, they refer to the facts and events in larger accounts, such as those portrayed in S-21 narratives or *The Killing Fields*, to establish a relationship between their own story and the dominant narratives and to emphasize their own extremely traumatic experiences during the DK period.

In the context of post-conflict societies, individual memory is constructed within a social and political spectrum, which at times fits within a narrative that forms a broader social identity. The way in which individuals of each social group, including those of base and new people, narrate their experiences indicates the extent to which they identify either as a victim or a perpetrator. In Cambodia, identification as a victim or perpetrator is not clearly distinguished. Following the genocide years, both groups live among one another. In most cases, their past experiences overlapped or are reversed. Those who served as a prison guard during DK may have become a prisoner later in life. In the specific case of Prek Ta Meak, in which a brutal purge took place, many cadres were imprisoned, executed, or subjected to forced labor in the Northwest Zone of the country. This is described by Kong in his narrative: “The country went through two stages of

control. Eastern Zone officials recruited me to work in a hospital. When the central level came, I lost all my rights. I was living a relatively peaceful life; suddenly, when the central level people came, they accused me of betraying *Angkar*. They stripped away all my rights and replaced my work group with different people. Along with others, I was sent to work in the fields, cutting trees and performing other small tasks” (author’s interview, July 22, 2014). As such, the identity of individuals as reflected in their respective narratives has meaning only when considered in the context of a broad social identity.

Likewise, those who served the Khmer Rouge tended to shape their narratives to fit the broader social narrative of victimhood. They recount selective memories by depicting stories that correspond to the larger narratives of victimhood. If we consider that the distinction between victim and perpetrator cannot be clearly distinguished, then we can better understand their tendency to tell stories that conform to the victim narratives rather than those that fall into the perpetrator accounts. Through the construction of their personal narratives, survivors can also formulate a social identity that conforms to a contemporary context. During the interviews, those who had been members of the Khmer Rouge often claimed that they had become a victim of the Khmer Rouge regime just like any of the other people in the village. If we consider their life experiences and take into account the purge and other extreme policies that affected not only new people but also Khmer Rouge cadres, it is difficult to clearly distinguish them or group them into a specific social identity. Despite the influence of dominant narratives, some former Khmer Rouge individuals who want to overcome their past actions find refuge in the protection of victim identity and try to maintain a low profile toward that end.

In short, individual narratives are shaped and contextualized within larger dominant narratives, broad identities, or significant tragic events of the past. These narratives conform to the role of victim in order to satisfy the individual social need for integration and also because memory inherently reinforces the chosen identity preference for individuals and groups. The discussion in

this research emphasizes the powerful influence of dominant or national narratives on individual memory. Michael Vickery's (1984) research regarding the differences in experiences of Cambodian survivors during the DK regime, based on regional and temporal variances, provides understanding into the variance of narratives as related by survivors from Prek Ta Meak commune. However, his argument, which states that the version of history promoted by the government does not correspond to the majority of Cambodians' experiences, does not correspond to the findings in this chapter. This chapter has demonstrated that individual narratives of the survivors do conform to the dominant narrative at the national level in terms of providing contextual understanding of the historical facts and creating a personal understanding of the recent tragic past. The state narratives that focus on the horrendous incidents at Tuol Sleng are compatible with the most tragic life experiences of Khmer Rouge survivors. As Ledgerwood has suggested, "Cambodians generally accept the story of the museum as true to their experiences"(1997: 82). For example, the narratives of incarceration shared by the former prisoners of Chamkar Siv security center in Prek Ta Meak described heinous violence and prison conditions similar to that of S-21. Considerable debate has been generated within the study of memory regarding the fundamental relationship between individual and collective memory. Indeed, as Alderman and Inwood (2013, 186) write, "How we imagine ourselves in the present is intimately linked to how we remember ourselves in the past." Crucially, this 'link' between past and present is the pivot, for it is at that *moment* where the political contestation over memory is fought, both formally and informally, and that link continues to dominate the national narratives regarding how the violence of the DK period is remembered. While memory by definition relates to the past, it is shaped to serve interests in the present and to carry certain cultural beliefs into the future. The notion that what is remembered tells us as much about the present and future as the past is a major foundation of memory studies (Alderman and Inwood 2013: 187).

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

This research provides insights into human experiences in the violent landscapes during and after the genocide years in Cambodia. The purpose of this research is three-fold. First, my research provides a contextual understanding of the violent landscapes in Cambodia, specifically the production of landscapes during the DK regime. I explore Khmer Rouge policies and practices and how direct violence, through torture, executions and structural violence which resulted in the intentional neglect of almost two million lives, manifests itself in the landscape of violence. Second, my research focuses on the experiences of Khmer Rouge survivors, including both base and new people, who currently live within these violent landscapes. It discusses the nature of their experiences during the genocide years and how they conduct their everyday life among those landscapes in the present. Finally, the analysis presented in this thesis explores the ways through which survivors remember their past experiences and interact with the violent landscapes on a daily basis. Through interviews with Khmer Rouge survivors, this research seeks to understand the impact of violence on survivors' everyday lives and on their memory of the past. I have explored the ways through which their present lives impact acts of memorialization at the local level.

This thesis utilizes a mixed qualitative methods approach for collection and analysis of data. The research is focused on the commune of Prek Ta Meak, located in Ksach Kandal District, Kandal Province, as a primary case study. This location contains many former Khmer Rouge sites that represent direct and structural violence during the DK regime. This site was selected because very little physical evidence of violence remains in the landscape, yet survivors continue to live and work among the violent landscapes of their memory.

Memories are fundamentally built within landscapes. In the context of Cambodia, where violence was pervasive and violent landscapes are inhabited spaces, the continuity of people's day-to-day activities in those landscapes is important for developing an understanding of the way in which people experience the daily aspect of violence. Thus the research analysis of people's experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime is presented in this context to gain insights into the individual lives of survivors. In addition to archival data, I incorporated in-depth interviews as part of my data collection approach. This is an important aspect of this study because it enables me to solicit the life stories of individuals and consider each unique perspective. It also allows me to probe into the lives and insights of my participants. I visited the Khmer Rouge security center, commune office, hospital, and mass graves associated with the security center. The analysis of the landscapes of violence presented in this thesis was derived from the narratives of these sites during and after the DK regime. I employed narrative analysis in this study to identify themes relating to memorialization of the violence, individual and national narratives, and narratives of base and new people.

## **Findings**

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated that survivors' narratives are powerful tools which provide insights that are complementary to the prevailing political narratives of the Khmer Rouge period. Despite the fact that the memory of past violence has been politicized and constructed to fit in the present dominant narratives, individual stories are crucial to our understandings of the contested meanings of memory and of the recent tragic past. Some narratives of individual survivors conform to the narratives constructed by the state while others work in challenging the dominant narratives so prevalent in the analysis of the Cambodian genocide. Although these notions are commonly described, they do not adequately address the complexities of the



Cambodian genocide. This research has therefore delved into the personal experiences of base and new people during the genocide years to discern the variance of living conditions, working conditions, and Khmer Rouge policies and practices on individuals and groups living in the research commune and in the Northwest Zone. Furthermore, I focused the examination on the relationships between the dominant and personal narratives of Cambodian survivors. This research also analyzes the process of the memorialization of Khmer Rouge victims at the local level after the collapse of the regime. In the contexts of landscapes of memory and memorialization, this research suggests that while the physical/materialized memorials are important in the commemorative practices of survivors, Cambodians have incorporated individual and family Buddhist rituals, including the *Pchum Ben* festival and other forms of religious ceremonies, to commemorate their loved ones who died during the DK period. Finally, the research finds that villagers are concerned about how the DK narratives will be passed on to their children and other members of younger generations. They proposed several ideas that they felt would be beneficial in educating young people about the DK regime. Many of these ideas have already been realized through the efforts of nonprofit groups as well as the current government.

#### *Local landscapes of violence and memorialization*

In this thesis, I have provided detailed descriptions of the sites of violence and accounts of survivors who lived and worked among those sites during and after the DK period. I focused my examination on the accounts of the hospital, commune office, mass graves and prison site of Chamkar Siv during the years of DK. Because the sites are not physically remarkable in the landscape today, the narratives told by survivors who experienced them provide insight into the violence that was perpetrated there. What can we learn from these accounts? The examination of these sites expands our knowledge of the detailed events which occurred within the local sites of violence and which may be revealed only through the narratives of survivors. Their narratives

complement the national narrative of the recent dark history of DK promulgated by the prominent sites of Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek. They also reveal the degree of similarity and difference between actual experiences at each site versus those espoused in the national narrative, particularly the experiences at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek. For example, the process of arrest and interrogation in Chamkar Siv was similar to those at S-21, although the majority of prisoners at Chamkar Siv were not former Khmer Rouge members. The administrative organization of the prison system determined the prison operation, including the daily operation, the process of arrest, interrogation, execution, and release. While release was rarely practiced at S-21, the Chamkar Siv security center released some prisoners after detaining them for a certain period of time. Much of the details within the prison including the working and living conditions conform to the narratives at S-21. It describes the traumatic and horrible experiences such as torture and interrogation and inhumane treatment on prisoners. However, we also learn that some prisoners experienced a relatively better condition in the prison. For example, a former female prisoner who was a new people, after being arrested and detained for a while, was put to work in the prison's kitchen. Her job was to prepare food for the prisoners. She thus received fairly good treatment in terms of food and freedom. Since minimal evidence of violence remains in the landscapes of violence in this research, individual memory assumes a critical role in preserving the historical narratives of the sites, which sometimes counters to the standard narratives.

In addition, narrative descriptions have revealed that the violence perpetrated at the commune and village level resulted from routine implementation of Khmer Rouge administrative policies. The daily administrative operations of the Khmer Rouge produced particular violent landscapes that reflected direct violence as well as implicit structural violence. As Tyner (2014) suggests, it is through those administrative practices that direct and structural violence is enhanced. Furthermore, the narratives from these sites also demonstrate policies and practices of various local social and political organizations which influenced Khmer Rouge decisions regarding

selection of particular individuals for job assignments in the hospital, commune office, or prison. The daily operation of the prison and other institutions was also revealed. This knowledge contributes an important understanding as to why Khmer Rouge policies and practices ultimately led to death, hard labor, and starvation.

Individual and collective memories about the DK period are constantly present as people go about their everyday lives in everyday landscapes. The memories are inscribed in both physical and non-physical forms. At Prek Ta Meak, a memorial stupa was constructed to mark the violence that was perpetrated against victims in the commune. However, the construction of the memorial does not simply preserve collective memories of the past—particularly remembering the victims who suffered from starvation, disease, and hard labor—but rather serves the specific collective narratives constructed as part of the government’s political efforts.

The site of memory was built to house human remains exhumed from mass graves in the surrounding area and to serve as a focal point for commemoration ceremonies. I argued that the memory of genocide and mass violence in the recent past history of Cambodia remains invisible in the physical landscape of memory and memorialization in Cambodia because various local sites of violence remain unremarked and the physical memorial that had been erected in the early period of the PRK regime has fallen into disrepair. Many local memorials, which were constructed primarily to reinforce the collective memory of genocide by the PRK regime, have been neglected and ultimately completely removed from the physical structure from the landscape. Although victim remains were relocated to an old Buddhist stupa, collective commemorative practices in the landscape (such as May 20<sup>th</sup> Day of Remembrance or January 7<sup>th</sup> Day of Liberation) are almost solely conducted as government-sponsored events. Therefore, the interest of the local population in participating in these events has sharply decreased over time. Instead, they have found complementary ways to memorialize the victims.

Furthermore, dominant narratives represented in the landscape have been challenged by acts of commemoration of individual survivors. While the state authorities exerted great effort to project their own narrative through the construction of memorials throughout the country, this study suggests that people at the local level feel disconnected to those memorials and prefer to memorialize the dead and commemorate the past in their own personal way. The diminishment of the physical memorial has reinforced survivors' participation in family funeral rituals and religious ceremonies, such as the *Pchum Ben* festival, to make offerings and memorialize victims of the Khmer Rouge regime. They have incorporated their religious beliefs into the act of memorialization and made a personal connection between the living and the dead. Judy Ledgerwood suggests that the *Pchum Ben* festival has become a critical way for individuals and families to commemorate those who died during the DK regime because through the festival, people can make offerings to all the deceased, including those who suffered violent deaths during the DK era (Ledgerwood 2012). As we closely examine everyday life of the survivors, the findings from this study suggest that the relationship between the living survivors and the deceased plays a significant role in the acts of memorialization. The interviews indicate that the majority of victims who were buried in mass graves were new people or evacuees whose surviving family members no longer reside in the village. The survivors further elaborate that the meaning of family attachment is important for Cambodians as they remember and memorialize sites associated with the Khmer Rouge regime. Therefore, the incentive to preserve the remains and conduct collective commemorations has gradually weakened. This is crucial to understand local memorialization. These findings correspond with Gollou's research (2012, 2013) on Cambodian rituals as they pertain to mass graves, in which counter-narratives are presented in relation to the larger narratives. When the memorials became neglected, Guillou (2012; 2013) suggests that family funeral rituals were increasingly performed by families whose relatives had died during the Khmer Rouge regime. The relationships between the

living and the dead are reproduced and restored through various religious rituals and Buddhist festivals, particularly after a period of war and mass violence.

From this study, we learn that the location of human remains and burial sites of relatives who died during DK remain important to survivors of the regime. Efforts to search for bodies or locate the place where a loved one died continue to be very important to survivors. I believe that the human remains placed at the memorial stupa played a critical role in local memorialization of the genocide victims. While this event is significant, the relationships between the survivors and the deceased continue to play a critical role in local commemorative practices. As indicated in the story of a base person who worked in the Khmer Rouge hospital, locating the remains of the victim's body was important to his uncle's family so that they could perform a proper funeral ritual. Another important commemorative practice at the local level is the belief that by locating the place of burial, surviving relatives can transfer merit to the deceased, thus freeing their spirit from suffering. Since spirits are attached to physical places in Cambodian belief, survivors feel connected to the dead and feel the need to perform rituals at the place of burial. Such religious acts, along with continuing searches for lost family members, has aided many survivors in gaining a sense of closure and creating an understanding of the mass violence which occurred. Since Buddhist tradition allows a transfer of merit to the deceased without the presence of a body, the *Pchum Ben* festival has become significant for Cambodians in the post-DK era (Ledgerwood 2012), along with other forms of collective memorialization such as the May 20<sup>th</sup> event. I would suggest that both practices commonly take place in the village. People perform Buddhist funeral rituals individually and collectively as part of their commemorative practices, with or without knowledge of the burial site or presence of human remains.

#### *Alternatives to memorials*

Survivors' narratives are powerful living testaments to what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime, especially when the memorial at Prek Ta Meak has fallen into disrepair and neglect.

This research has found that in this situation personal narratives make a valuable contribution to the study of survivors' experiences and memory of the violence that took place at the local level. However, while survivors' narratives are significant in establishing a more complete understanding of the Khmer Rouge regime, this research also suggests challenges for the nation's efforts in preserving memory of the Khmer Rouge. The villagers of Prek Ta Meak have expressed concern that their personal narratives alone will not suffice to educate the younger generation about life experiences during the DK regime. The physical memorials and markers are well recognized as an important means for teaching children about the atrocities of the past; however, in the absence of these symbolic materials, a larger effort to promote reconciliation and prevent future mass atrocity remains a primary concern for most participants. This thesis indicates that survivors feel an urgency to educate children about Khmer Rouge history in an effort to prevent the recurrence of genocide in the future.

While many Cambodians expressed concern about the younger generation not being able to learn about DK history due to the lack of attention to sites of violence and memorials, many survivors emphasized alternative ways of learning about the DK. The majority of participants in this study proposed many different alternatives to physical memorials. They state that formal education and informal public displays are the most effective means of ensuring that the past is not forgotten. These comments reinforce the larger efforts made by nonprofit organizations, in collaboration with the government, in providing genocide education to children. In 2004, DC-Cam developed a Genocide Education Project in collaboration with Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, to integrate the history of Democratic Kampuchea into the formal education curriculum at the secondary and high school levels. A history textbook, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea* (2007), and *A Teacher's Guidebook* have been developed and distributed to all secondary and high schools throughout Cambodia to provide supplementary materials about the Khmer Rouge regime

for teachers and students.<sup>10</sup> Outside of the formal classroom setting, outreach and exhibitions designed to provide education and discussion about DK history and the ongoing trials of the Khmer Rouge leaders add to existing efforts of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal to disseminate knowledge about the trials and Khmer Rouge history. Many survivors in the village were aware of the ongoing Khmer Rouge Tribunal and its outreach efforts and said that they closely followed the first trial involving the former S-21 prison chief, *Kaing Guek Eav*, alias Duch. They commented that the trials formalize the ‘truth’ of what happened during the DK regime and allowed them to initiate a discussion with their children about the Khmer Rouge regime. The former commune chief said that he participated in a tour of the Tuol Sleng museum, Choeung Ek memorial site, and ECCC, which was arranged by DC-Cam. He felt that the visit provided him with the opportunity to share knowledge of the Tribunal and the DK period with the rest of the community. It also made him more inclined to follow news related to the Tribunal on TV and radio. While many villagers expressed concern that their children were skeptical of their personal narratives about the DK period, some survivors said that the Tribunal, outreach, and formal education programs in the schools have encouraged children to ask their families about their experiences during that time. Many survivors also stressed that having their children learn and accept the history of the DK regime validated their own experiences and personal narratives.

#### *Individual and national narratives*

This thesis has examined the relationship between survivors’ narratives, including both base and new people, and the national narrative. The primary findings indicate that although survivors had first-hand experience of the Khmer Rouge regime, they constructed their narratives in the context of the larger historical narrative. As presented through the narratives of base and new people, the research suggests that individual memory is situated and contextualized in the

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<sup>10</sup> See details at [http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Genocide/Genocide\\_Education.htm](http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Genocide/Genocide_Education.htm) accessed on September 5, 2015

larger historical narrative of the Khmer Rouge. Many of the dominant notions suggest that the experiences of survivors conform to a single narration detailing starvation, hard labor, torture, and executions. Immediately after the PRK was established, two infamous sites of the DK regime—the S-21 security center known as Tuol Sleng and the Choeung Ek killing fields— were converted into a genocide museum and a memorial site, respectively. The roles of Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek as evidence of Khmer Rouge atrocities and genocide crimes have been established as the state narrative. Soon after the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed, the PRK state clearly placed the blame for the devastating violence that took place in Cambodia on the DK regime. By condemning the DK as genocidal and by portraying the extreme horror and brutality of the regime, the PRK legitimized its government. This strategy also cautioned the population to support the PRK to preclude DK from returning to power and perpetrating possible further violence and genocide. Besides the curatorial work at Tuol Sleng, including the skull map, the PRK directed local authorities to exhume human remains at the village level to collect evidence of the crimes that were committed across geographical regions. This evidence is important to support the narratives represented at Tuol Sleng and Cheung Ek. Statistics regarding mass graves and human bodies were collected and reported. The data from this research was later updated by DC-Cam as part of their mapping project. Local memorial stupas were constructed throughout the country to hold the remains and commemorate the victims. Commemoration events, including May 20<sup>th</sup> Day of Anger and January 7<sup>th</sup> Victory Day, were celebrated annually at the local memorial stupas, as well as in Phnom Penh, to pay homage to those who died and to collectively express anguish. All of these efforts reinforced the evident violence and brutality at Tuol Sleng, proving that the brutal practices of the DK were widespread across the country.

While the brutality and violence on display at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek supported the state narrative and were primarily used to gain legitimacy for the state, these experiences reinforce the individual memories of DK survivors, especially their most traumatic memories. As Langer



explains in his concept of 'deep' memory, a survivor's most traumatic experiences often surface as they relate their narratives and this tends to disrupt the smooth chronological flow of 'common' memory (1991). In this research, the worst memories of individual survivors did interrupt the narrative flow of the interviews, conforming to the larger narratives. Ledgerwood asserts that the state narrative presented through Tuol Sleng, which displays the heinous crimes of the DK regime, is consistent with the individual oral histories of survivors who lived through the DK regime. The facts espoused by the state narrative ring true to their personal experiences, especially their worst memories at the worst time (Ledgerwood 1997). When a historical narrative is presented to the public, survivors only accept the narrative if it corresponds to their actual experiences of that history (Barkan 2000: 231). The data from this research confirms this argument, as demonstrated by the experiences of base people who were incarcerated at Chamkar Siv prison, as well as those of new people who resided in Prek Ta Meak commune and Battambang Province. The former prisoner's experience at Chamkar Siv, to a great degree, was comparable to the experiences at S-21.

While I originally anticipated that the narratives of the local villagers would be isolated and differ from the broader references detailing evacuations, social organization, working and living conditions, and unequal treatment base and new people commonly depicted about the DK regime, the research shows that the interviewees generally validate these references, for example, in their descriptions of corpses on the street or pregnant women who were about to deliver a baby. For example, Kunthea's narrative of evacuation briefly referenced the story depicted in the film *The Killing Fields*. Survivors link their personal experiences to the larger narrative as a means to make comparisons and build a comprehensive connection with the dominant narrative. The other examples indicate that the story of Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum was introduced prior to the interview between a former Khmer Rouge prisoner and the author, because the interviewee believes that the author can only make a connection to his personal experiences through this reference. This finding does not completely agree with Vickery's argument, which states that

accounts of DK life, described as the Standard Total View, were distorted or untrue. In fact, survivors made references, to a certain degree, to extreme and devastating experiences that correspond with the detailed descriptions of the STV. Finally, the facts and events that correspond to the dominant narratives are established to provide historical contexts for their own experiences so that the audience can relate to their personal stories.

Nonetheless, the accounts of survivors and their references to the dominant narrative are not uniform. Some details of life experiences that emerged in the survivors' narratives certainly counter the larger narratives. This pattern occurs in the examination of the treatment of base and new people, as well as in the analysis of Khmer Rouge social organization. For instance, the narrative about the hospital, told by a former Khmer Rouge medical staff member, and the narrative about the Khmer Rouge's treatment of intellectuals present a counter-narrative of the national, dominant narrative. The variance in the experiences of base and new people and the ways in which they portray their respective narratives also explain this important notion. Vickery's research on the experiences of Cambodian survivors suggests that the variations in people's experiences during the DK period depend upon the geographical region and time period. He challenges some of the most prevalent stories of the period, which state that all intellectuals, everyone who wore glasses, and the Khmer who returned from abroad were executed immediately. Although Vickery's point is confirmed by the findings in this thesis, I would add that these stories were not told in complete detachment from references to the standard narratives. The differences in life circumstances during DK do not diminish the accounts of STV, but rather reinforce various individual versions of the worst memories. This point remains contentious in my own analysis, as I observe that the experiences of both base and new people often overlapped or were reversed, which makes it difficult to define patterns for each group. Base people tend to provide a perspective of life in Khmer Rouge society in their narratives, while new people tend to describe the extreme living and working conditions, which correspond more closely to the larger national narrative.

In the studied village, base and new people seemed to share similar living conditions, but their narrations vary depending on how they discern their own identity. The grey line between survivors and perpetrators also contributes to an explanation of this claim of identity. While new people are more likely to describe their own experiences in the context of victimhood, their counterpart, the base people, construct a narrative that responds to the victim identity as well. This is the reason why narratives related by base and new people are constructed differently. In this case, the distinctions become difficult and the narratives reflect that of commonality in the accounts of the Khmer Rouge regime.

## **Limitations**

Studies of survivor experiences through narratives have both strengths and limitations. Some scholars have argued that it is a challenge to employ personal memory to build narratives of the past because memory is selective and fragmented. They emphasize the subjectivity of the data sources, such as interviews and narratives. In addition, the relationship of researched and researcher can bias research results. The researcher may influence the interpretation of the participants' memories and manner of responding to the questions.

I am aware of these limitations, and my aim in this study is to document the experiences of survivors who currently live in the violent landscapes. I do not anticipate providing a complete history of the Khmer Rouge through this study, nor am I intending to provide a full understanding of people's lives and their interactions with the landscape. For example, I do not expect to speak for other survivors regarding how they memorialize the past. Because this study is limited to one commune and my discussion is built upon a portion of the data from interviews, I do not intend to generalize my interpretation and apply it to other similar cases. Although the data is not able to be generalized, it sheds light on people's experiences of violence and how they live with violence

embedded on the landscape of their everyday life. I am also seeking to understand how survivors lived their lives during the regime, how their memory of the Khmer Rouge impacts them as reflected in their interaction with the landscape today, and how they continue to live their everyday lives through the stories they narrate. Therefore, I consider the narrative approach as an effective way to help us understand the human experience and gain insight regarding the lives of the participants.

### **Future Research**

This research has provided an understanding into survivors' experiences in the violent landscapes through personal narratives. It contributes to a better understanding of the geographies of everyday life and the geography of violence. The growing body of literature that addresses landscapes of violence pays greater attention to issues surrounding materialized and memorialized landscapes of violence. A few studies have directly examined mundane experiences of survivors in the context of genocide, especially the process of space productions. Thus, with the vast amount of data from the personal narrations, further studies can be developed to provide deeper analysis of these experiences. Primarily future work could potentially examine the dismantled materials from the Khmer Rouge detention center of Chamkar Siv and the post-genocide interpretation of the materials. This work can be drawn from existing literature relating to industrial ruin and material worlds (Edensor 2005, 2007) to develop a conceptual understanding of the removal and reuse of a former prison's building materials to erect a new structure.

Additionally, a conceptual framework relating to 'absent presence' (Maddrell 2013; Hockey et al. 2012; Gin 2013) could possibly be useful to explore the effect of the memory of violence (i.e. torture, interrogation, or hard labor at the Chamkar Siv Prison) on survivors who still live in the vicinity of the prison. From this study, the material landscapes of memory keeps evolving and one

cannot reveal the past violence that once took place on the landscapes without survivors' narratives. The violence is embedded in the material absence in the landscapes. Only the survivors may be able to tell the stories of what happened there. At the same time, survivors are gradually passing from the world and memories of the mass violence, constantly contested and renegotiated, have an effect on how they continue to live and interact among the landscapes and how they construct their narratives. Memories of the past violence may be explored in the framework of material absence and contemporarily social and political changes. Finally, the preceding work of Marianne Hirsch (2012) on the postmemory of the Holocaust creates a useful foundation as conceptual information for an exploration of the trace of trajectory of memory from the survivors to the younger generation. This framework can be projected to examine the experiences of the younger generation and their parents in the context of genocide. Further studies on human experiences in relations to the social and environment changes could potentially provide another level of understandings into other aspects of the genocide and its aftermath.

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